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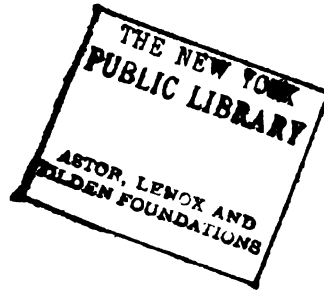
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# HUNTING TRIPS OF A RANCHMAN

AN ACCOUNT OF THE BIG GAME OF THE UNITED STATES AND ITS CHASE WITH HORSE, HOUND AND RIFLE

BY

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME I

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
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TO THAT
KEENEST OF SPORTSMEN
AND
TRUEST OF FRIENDS
MY BROTHER
ELLIOTT ROOSEVELT

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# HUNTING TRIPS OF A RANCHMAN

# HUNTING TRIPS OF A RANCHMAN

## CHAPTER I

### RANCHING IN THE BAD LANDS

THE great middle plains of the United States, parts of which are still scantily peopled, by men of Mexican parentage, while other parts have been but recently won from the war-like tribes of Horse Indians, now form a broad pastoral belt, stretching in a north and south line from British America to the Rio Grande. Throughout this great belt of grazing land almost the only industry is stock-raising, which is here engaged in on a really gigantic scale; and it is already nearly covered with the ranches of the stockmen, except on those isolated tracts (often themselves of great extent) from which the red men look hopelessly and sullenly out upon their old hunting-grounds, now roamed over by the countless herds of long-horned cattle. The northern portion of this belt is that which has been most lately thrown open to

the whites; and it is with this part only that we have to do.

The Northern cattle plains occupy the basin of the Upper Missouri; that is, they occupy all of the land drained by the tributaries of that river, and by the river itself, before it takes its long trend to the southeast. They stretch from the rich wheat farms of Central Dakota to the Rocky Mountains, and southward to the Black Hills and the Big Horn chain, thus including all of Montana, Northern Wyoming, and extreme Western Dakota. The character of this rolling, broken, plains country is everywhere much the same. It is a high, nearly treeless region, of light rainfall, crossed by streams which are sometimes rapid torrents and sometimes merely strings of shallow pools. In places, it stretches out into deserts of alkali and sage-brush, or into nearly level prairies of short grass, extending many miles without a break; elsewhere there are rolling hills, sometimes of considerable height; and in other places the ground is rent and broken into the most fantastic shapes, partly by volcanic action and partly by the action of water in a dry climate. These latter portions form the famous Bad Lands. Cottonwood trees fringe the streams or stand in groves on the alluvial bottoms of the rivers; and some of the steep hills and canyon sides are clad with pines or stunted cedars. In the

early spring, when the young blades first sprout, the land looks green and bright; but during the rest of the year there is no such appearance of freshness, for the short bunch-grass is almost brown, and the gray-green sage bush, bitter and withered-looking, abounds everywhere, and gives a peculiarly barren aspect to the landscape.

It is but little over half a dozen years since these lands were won from the Indians. They were their only remaining great hunting-grounds, and towards the end of the last decade all of the Northern plains tribes went on the war-path in a final desperate effort to preserve them. After bloody fighting and protracted campaigns, they were defeated, and the country thrown open to the whites, while the building of the Northern Pacific Railroad gave immigration an immense impetus. There were great quantities of game, especially buffalo, and the hunters who thronged in to pursue the huge herds of the latter were the rough forerunners of civilization. No longer dreading the Indians, and having the railway on which to transport the robes, they followed the buffalo in season and out, until, in 1883, the herds were practically destroyed. But, meanwhile, the cattlemen formed the vanguard of the white settlers. Already the hardy Southern stockmen had passed up with their wild-looking herds to the very border of the dangerous land,

and even into it, trusting to luck and their own prowess for their safety; and the instant the danger was even partially removed, their cattle swarmed northward along the streams. Some Eastern men, seeing the extent of the grazing country, brought stock out by the railroad, and the short-horned beasts became almost as plenty as the wilder-looking Southern steers. At the present time, indeed, the cattle of these Northern ranges show more short-horn than long-horn blood.

Cattle-raising on the plains, as now carried on, started in Texas, where the Americans had learned it from the Mexicans whom they dispossessed. It has only become a prominent feature of Western life during the last score of years. When the Civil War was raging, there were hundreds of thousands of bony, half-wild steers and cows in Texas, whose value had hitherto been very slight; but toward the middle of the struggle they became a most important source of food supply to both armies, and when the war had ended, the profits of the business were widely known and many men had gone into it. At first, the stock-raising was all done in Texas, and the beef-steers, when ready for sale, were annually driven north along what became a regular cattle trail. Soon the men of Kansas and Colorado began to start ranches, and Texans who were getting crowded out moved

their herds north into these lands, and afterward into Wyoming. Large herds of yearling steers also were, and still are, driven from the breeding ranches of the South to some Northern range, there to be fattened for three years before selling. The cattle trail led through great wastes, and the scores of armed cowboys who, under one or two foremen, accompanied each herd, had often to do battle with bands of hostile Indians; but this danger is now a thing of the past, as, indeed, will soon be the case with the cattle trail itself, for year by year the grangers press steadily westward into it, and when they have once settled in a place, will not permit the cattle to be driven across it.

In the Northern country, the ranches vary greatly in size: on some there may be but a few hundred head, on others ten times as many thousand. The land is still in great part unsurveyed, and is hardly anywhere fenced in, the cattle roaming over it at will. The small ranches are often quite close to one another, say within a couple of miles; but the home ranch of a big outfit will not have another building within ten or twenty miles of it, or, indeed, if the country is dry, not within fifty. The ranch-house may be only a mud dug-out, or a "shack" made of logs stuck upright in the ground; more often, it is a fair-sized, well-made building of hewn logs, divided into several rooms.

Around it are grouped the other buildings—log stables, cow-sheds, and hay-ricks, an outhouse in which to store things, and, on large ranches, another house in which the cowboys sleep. The strongly made, circular horse-corral, with a snubbing-post in the middle, stands close by; the larger cow-corral, in which the stock is branded, may be some distance off. A small patch of ground is usually enclosed as a vegetable garden, and a very large one, with water in it, as a pasture to be used only in special cases. All the work is done on horseback, and the quantity of ponies is thus of necessity very great, some of the large outfits numbering them by hundreds; on my own ranch there are eighty. Most of them are small, wiry beasts, not very speedy, but with good bottom, and able to pick up a living under the most adverse circumstances. There are usually a few large, fine horses kept for the special use of the ranchman or foreman. The best are those from Oregon; most of them come from Texas, and many are bought from the Indians. They are broken in a very rough manner, and many are in consequence vicious brutes, with the detestable habit of bucking. Of this habit I have a perfect dread, and, if I can help it, never get on a confirmed bucker. The horse puts his head down between his forefeet, arches his back, and with stiff legs gives a succession of jarring jumps, often "chang-

ing ends" as he does so. Even if a man can keep his seat, the performance gives him about as uncomfortable a shaking up as can be imagined.

The cattle rove free over the hills and prairies, picking up their own living even in winter, all the animals of each herd having certain distinctive brands on them. But little attempt is made to keep them within definite bounds, and they wander whither they wish, except that the ranchmen generally combine to keep some of their cowboys riding lines to prevent them straying away altogether. The missing ones are generally recovered in the annual round-ups, when the calves are branded. These round-ups, in which many outfits join together, and which cover hundreds of miles of territory, are the busiest periods of the year for the stockmen, who then, with their cowboys, work from morning till night. In winter, little is done except a certain amount of line riding.

The cowboys form a class by themselves, and are now quite as typical representatives of the wilder side of Western life as were a few years ago the skin-clad hunters and trappers. They are mostly of native birth, and although there are among them wild spirits from every land, yet the latter soon become undistinguishable from their American companions, for these plainsmen are far from being so heterogeneous as is commonly supposed. On the contrary, all have a curious

similarity to each other; existence in the West seems to put the same stamp upon each and every one of them. Sinewy, hardy, self-reliant, their life forces them to be both daring and adventurous, and the passing over their heads of a few years leaves printed on their faces certain lines which tell of dangers quietly fronted and hardships uncomplainingly endured. They are far from being as lawless as they are described; though they sometimes cut queer antics when, after many months of lonely life, they come into a frontier town in which drinking and gambling are the only recognized forms of amusement, and where pleasure and vice are considered synonymous terms. On the round-ups, or when a number get together, there is much boisterous, often foul-mouthed, mirth; but they are rather silent, self-contained men when with strangers, and are frank and hospitable to a degree. The Texans are perhaps the best at the actual cowboy work. They are absolutely fearless riders and understand well the habits of the half-wild cattle, being unequalled in those most trying times when, for instance, the cattle are stampeded by a thunderstorm at night, while in the use of the rope they are only excelled by the Mexicans. On the other hand, they are prone to drink, and, when drunk, to shoot. Many Kansans, and others from the Northern States, have also taken up the life of

late years, and though these scarcely reach, in point of skill and dash, the standard of the Southerners, who may be said to be born in the saddle, yet they are to the full as resolute and even more trustworthy. My own foremen were originally Eastern backwoodsmen.

The cowboy's dress is both picturesque and serviceable, and, like many of the terms of his pursuit, is partly of Hispano-Mexican origin. It consists of a broad felt hat, a flannel shirt, with a bright silk handkerchief loosely knotted round the neck, trousers tucked into high-heeled boots, and a pair of leather "shaps" (*chaperajos*) or heavy riding overalls. Great spurs and a large-calibre revolver complete the costume. For horse gear there is a cruel curb bit, and a very strong, heavy saddle with high pommel and cantle. This saddle seems needlessly weighty, but the work is so rough as to make strength the first requisite. A small pack is usually carried behind it; also saddle pockets, or small saddle-bags; and there are strings wherewith to fasten the loops of the rawhide lariat. The pommel has to be stout, as one end of the lariat is twisted around it when work is to be done, and the strain upon it is tremendous when a vigorous steer has been roped, or when, as is often the case, a wagon gets stuck and the team has to be helped out by one of the riders hauling from the saddle. A ranchman or foreman

dresses precisely like the cowboys, except that the materials are finer, the saddle leather being handsomely carved, the spurs, bit, and revolver silver-mounted, the shaps of sealskin, etc. The revolver was formerly a necessity, to protect the owner from Indians and other human foes; this is still the case in a few places, but, as a rule, it is now carried merely from habit, or to kill rattlesnakes, or on the chance of falling in with a wolf or coyote, while not unfrequently it is used to add game to the cowboy's not too varied bill of fare.

A cowboy is always a good and bold rider, but his seat in the saddle is not at all like that of one of our Eastern or Southern fox-hunters. The stirrups are so long that the man stands almost erect in them, from his head to his feet being a nearly straight line. It is difficult to compare the horsemanship of a Western plainsman with that of an Eastern or Southern cross-country rider. In following hounds over fences and high walls, on a spirited horse needing very careful humoring, the latter would certainly excel; but he would find it hard work to sit a bucking horse like a cowboy, or to imitate the headlong dash with which one will cut out a cow marked with his own brand from a herd of several hundred others, or will follow at full speed the twistings and doublings of a refractory steer over ground where an Eastern horse would hardly keep its feet walking.

My own ranches, the Elkhorn and the Chimney Butte, lie along the eastern border of the cattle country, where the Little Missouri flows through the heart of the Bad Lands. This, like most other plains rivers, has a broad, shallow bed, through which in times of freshets runs a muddy torrent that neither man nor beast can pass; at other seasons of the year it is very shallow, spreading out into pools, between which the trickling water may be but a few inches deep. Even then, however, it is not always easy to cross, for the bottom is filled with quicksands and mud-holes. The river flows in long sigmoid curves through an alluvial valley of no great width. The amount of this alluvial land enclosed by a single bend is called a bottom, which may be either covered with cottonwood trees or else be simply a great grass meadow. From the edges of the valley the land rises abruptly in steep high buttes, whose crests are sharp and jagged. This broken country extends back from the river for many miles, and has been called always, by Indians, French voyageurs, and American trappers alike, the "Bad Lands," partly from its dreary and forbidding aspect and partly from the difficulty experienced in travelling through it. Every few miles it is crossed by creeks which open into the Little Missouri, of which they are simply repetitions in miniature, except that during most of the year they are

almost dry, some of them having in their beds here and there a never-failing spring or muddy alkaline-water hole. From these creeks run coulies, or narrow, winding valleys, through which water flows when the snow melts; their bottoms contain patches of brush, and they lead back into the heart of the Bad Lands. Some of the buttes spread out into level plateaus, many miles in extent; others form chains, or rise as steep, isolated masses. Some are of volcanic origin, being composed of masses of scoria; the others, of sandstone or clay, are worn by water into the most fantastic shapes. In coloring, they are as bizarre as in form. Among the level, parallel strata which make up the land are some of coal. When a coal vein gets on fire it makes what is called a burning mine, and the clay above it is turned into brick; so that where water wears away the side of a hill sharp streaks of black and red are seen across it, mingled with the grays, purples, and browns. Some of the buttes are overgrown with gnarled, stunted cedars or small pines, and they are all cleft through and riven in every direction by deep narrow ravines, or by canyons with perpendicular sides.

In spite of their look of savage desolation, the Bad Lands make a good cattle country, for there is plenty of nourishing grass and excellent shelter from the winter storms. The cattle keep close to them in the cold months, while in the summer time

they wander out on the broad prairies stretching back of them, or come down to the river bottoms.

My home-ranch stands on the river brink. From the low, long veranda, shaded by leafy cottonwoods, one looks across sand-bars and shallows to a strip of meadowland, behind which rises a line of sheer cliffs and grassy plateaus. This veranda is a pleasant place in the summer evenings when a cool breeze stirs along the river and blows in the faces of the tired men, who loll back in their rocking-chairs (what true American does not enjoy a rocking-chair?), book in hand—though they do not often read the books, but rock gently to and fro, gazing sleepily out at the weird-looking buttes opposite, until their sharp lines grow indistinct and purple in the afterglow of the sunset. The story-high house of hewn logs is clean and neat, with many rooms, so that one can be alone if one wishes to. The nights in summer are cool and pleasant, and there are plenty of bearskins and buffalo robes, trophies of our own skill, with which to bid defiance to the bitter cold of winter. In summer time, we are not much within doors, for we rise before dawn and work hard enough to be willing to go to bed soon after nightfall. The long winter evenings are spent sitting round the hearthstone, while the pine logs roar and crackle, and the men play checkers or chess, in the firelight. The rifles stand in

the corners of the room or rest across the elk-antlers which jut out from over the fireplace. From the deer-horns ranged along the walls and thrust into the beams and rafters hang heavy overcoats of wolfskin or coonskin, and otter-fur or beaver-fur caps and gauntlets. Rough board shelves hold a number of books, without which some of the evenings would be long indeed. No ranchman who loves sport can afford to be without Van Dyke's "Still Hunter," Dodge's "Plains of the Great West," or Caton's "Deer and Antelope of America"; and Coues's "Birds of the Northwest" will be valued if he cares at all for natural history. A Western plainsman is reminded every day, by the names of the prominent landmarks among which he rides, that the country was known to men who spoke French long before any of his own kinsfolk came to it, and hence he reads with a double interest Parkman's histories of the early Canadians. As for Irving, Hawthorne, Cooper, Lowell, and the other standbys, I suppose no man, East or West, would willingly be long without them; while for lighter reading there are dreamy Ike Marvel, Burroughs's breezy pages, and the quaint, pathetic character-sketches of the Southern writers—Cable, Craddock, Macon, Joel Chandler Harris, and sweet Sherwood Bonner. And when one is in the Bad Lands he feels as if they somehow *look* just exactly as Poe's tales and poems *sound*.

By the way, my books have some rather unexpected foes, in the shape of the pack rats. These are larger than our house rats, with soft gray fur, big eyes, and bushy tails, like a squirrel's; they are rather pretty beasts and very tame, often coming into the shacks and log cabins of the settlers. Woodmen and plainsmen, in their limited vocabulary, make great use of the verb "pack," which means to carry, more properly to carry on one's back; and these rats were christened pack rats on account of their curious and inveterate habit of dragging off to their holes every object they can possibly move. From the hole of one, underneath the wall of a hut, I saw taken a small revolver, a hunting-knife, two books, a fork, a small bag, and a tin cup. The little shack mice are much more common than the rats, and among them there is a wee pocket-mouse, with pouches on the outside of its little cheeks.

In the spring, when the thickets are green, the hermit thrushes sing sweetly in them; when it is moonlight, the voluble, cheery notes of the thrashers or brown thrushes can be heard all night long. One of our sweetest, loudest songsters is the meadow-lark; this I could hardly get used to at first, for it looks exactly like the Eastern meadow-lark, which utters nothing but a harsh disagreeable chatter. But the plains air seems to give it a voice, and it will perch on the top of a bush or tree

and sing for hours in rich, bubbling tones. Out on the prairie there are several kinds of plains sparrows which sing very brightly, one of them hovering in the air all the time, like a bobolink. Sometimes, in the early morning, when crossing the open, grassy plateaus, I have heard the prince of them all, the Missouri skylark. The skylark sings on the wing, soaring over head and mounting in spiral curves until it can hardly be seen, while its bright, tender strains never cease for a moment. I have sat on my horse and listened to one singing for a quarter of an hour at a time without stopping. There is another bird, also, which sings on the wing, though I have not seen the habit put down in the books. One bleak, March day, when snow covered the ground and the shaggy ponies crowded about the empty corral, a flock of snow-buntings came familiarly round the cow-shed, clambering over the ridge-pole and roof. Every few moments one of them would mount into the air, hovering about with quivering wings and warbling a loud, merry song, with some very sweet notes. They were a most welcome little group of guests, and we were sorry when, after loitering around a day or two, they disappeared towards their breeding haunts.

In the still fall nights, if we lie awake, we can listen to the clanging cries of the water-fowl, as their flocks speed southward; and in cold weather

the coyotes occasionally come near enough for us to hear their uncanny wailing. The larger wolves, too, now and then join in, with a kind of deep, dismal howling; but this melancholy sound is more often heard when out camping than from the ranch-house.

The charm of ranch life comes in its freedom, and the vigorous open-air existence it forces a man to lead. Except when hunting in bad ground, the whole time away from the house is spent in the saddle, and there are so many ponies that a fresh one can always be had. These ponies are of every size and disposition, and rejoice in names as different as their looks. Hackamore, Wire Fence, Steel Trap, War Cloud, Pinto, Buckskin, Circus, and Standing Jimmie are among those that, as I write, are running frantically around the corral in the vain effort to avoid the rope, wielded by the dextrous and sinewy hand of a broad-hatted cowboy.

A ranchman is kept busy most of the time, but his hardest work comes during the spring and fall round-ups, when the calves are branded or the beeves gathered for market. Our round-up district includes the Beaver and Little Beaver creeks (both of which always contain running water, and head up toward each other), and as much of the river, nearly two hundred miles in extent, as lies between their mouths. All the ranches along the lines of these two creeks and the river space

between join in sending from one to three or four men to the round-up, each man taking eight ponies; and for every six or seven men there will be a four-horse wagon to carry the blankets and mess-kit. The whole, including perhaps forty or fifty cowboys, is under the head of one first-class foreman, styled the captain of the round-up. Beginning at one end of the line, the round-up works along clear to the other. Starting at the head of one creek, the wagons and the herd of spare ponies go down ten or twelve miles, while the cowboys, divided into small parties, scour the neighboring country, covering a great extent of territory, and in the evening come into the appointed place with all the cattle they have seen. This big herd, together with the pony herd, is guarded and watched all night, and driven during the day. At each home-ranch (where there is always a large corral fitted for the purpose) all the cattle of that brand are cut out from the rest of the herd, which is to continue its journey; and the cows and calves are driven into the corral, where the latter are roped, thrown, and branded. In throwing the rope from horse-back, the loop, held in the right hand, is swung round and round the head by a motion of the wrist; when on foot, the hand is usually held by the side, the loop dragging on the ground. It is a pretty sight to see a man who knows how use the rope; again and again an expert will catch fifty

animals by the leg without making a misthrow. But unless practice is begun very young, it is hard to become really proficient.

Cutting out cattle, next to managing a stampeded herd at night, is that part of the cowboy's work needing the boldest and most skilful horsemanship. A young heifer or steer is very loth to leave the herd, always tries to break back into it, can run like a deer, and can dodge like a rabbit; but a thorough cattle-pony enjoys the work as much as its rider, and follows a beast like a four-footed fate through every double and turn. The ponies for the cutting-out or afternoon work are small and quick; those used for the circle-riding in the morning have need rather to be strong and rangey.

The work on a round-up is very hard, but although the busiest it is also the pleasantest part of a cowboy's existence. His food is good, though coarse, and his sleep is sound indeed; while the work is very exciting, and is done in company, under the stress of an intense rivalry between all the men, both as to their own skill and as to the speed and training of their horses. Clumsiness, and still more the slightest approach to timidity, expose a man to the roughest and most merciless raillery; and the unfit are weeded out by a very rapid process of natural selection. When the work is over for the day the men gather round the fire for an hour or two to sing songs, talk,

smoke, and tell stories; and he who has a good voice, or, better still, can play a fiddle or banjo, is sure to receive his meed of most sincere homage.

Though the ranchman is busiest during the round-up, yet he is far from idle at other times. He rides round among the cattle to see if any are sick, visits any outlying camp of his men, hunts up any bands of ponies which may stray,—and they are always straying,—superintends the haying, and, in fact, does not often find that he has too much leisure on his hands. Even in winter he has work which must be done. His ranch supplies milk, butter, eggs, and potatoes, and his rifle keeps him, at least intermittently, in fresh meat; but coffee, sugar, flour, and whatever else he may want has to be hauled in, and this is generally done when the ice will bear. Then firewood must be chopped; or, if there is a good vein of coal, as on my ranch, the coal must be dug out and hauled in. Altogether, though the ranchman will have time enough to take shooting trips, he will be very far from having time to make shooting a business, as a stranger who comes for nothing else can afford to do.

There are now no Indians left in my immediate neighborhood, though a small party of harmless Grosventres occasionally passes through; yet it is but six years since the Sioux surprised and killed five men in a log station just south of me, where

the Fort Keogh trail crosses the river; and, two years ago, when I went down on the prairies towards the Black Hills, there was still danger from Indians. That summer the buffalo hunters had killed a couple of Crows, and while we were on the prairie a long-range skirmish occurred near us between some Cheyennes and a number of cowboys. In fact, we ourselves were one day scared by what we thought to be a party of Sioux; but, on riding towards them, they proved to be half-breed Crees, who were more afraid of us than we were of them.

During the past century a good deal of sentimental nonsense has been talked about our taking the Indians' land. Now, I do not mean to say for a moment that gross wrong has not been done the Indians, both by government and individuals, again and again. The government makes promises impossible to perform, and then fails to do even what it might toward their fulfilment; and where brutal and reckless frontiersmen are brought into contact with a set of treacherous, revengeful, and fiendishly cruel savages, a long series of outrages by both sides is sure to follow. But as regards taking the land, at least from the Western Indians, the simple truth is that the latter never had any real ownership in it at all. Where the game was plenty, there they hunted; they followed it when it moved away to new hunting-

grounds, unless they were prevented by stronger rivals, and to most of the land on which we found them they had no stronger claim than that of having a few years previously butchered the original occupants. When my cattle came to the Little Missouri, the region was only inhabited by a score or so of white hunters; their title to it was quite as good as that of most Indian tribes to the lands they claim; yet nobody dreamed of saying that these hunters owned the country. Each could eventually have kept his own claim of 160 acres, and no more. The Indians should be treated in just the same way that we treat the white settlers. Give each his little claim; if, as would generally happen, he declined this, why, then let him share the fate of the thousands of white hunters and trappers who have lived on the game that the settlement of the country has exterminated, and let him, like these whites, who will not work, perish from the face of the earth which he cumbers.

The doctrine seems merciless, and so it is; but it is just and rational for all that. It does not do to be merciful to a few, at the cost of justice to the many. The cattlemen at least keep herds and build houses on the land; yet I would not for a moment debar settlers from the right of entry to the cattle country, though their coming in means in the end the destruction of us and our industry.

For we ourselves and the life that we lead will shortly pass away from the plains as completely as the red and white hunters who have vanished from before our herds. The free, open-air life of the ranchman, the pleasantest and healthiest life in America, is from its very nature ephemeral. The broad and boundless prairies have already been bounded and will soon be made narrow. It is scarcely a figure of speech to say that the tide of white settlement during the last few years has risen over the West like a flood; and the cattlemen are but the spray from the crest of the wave, thrown far in advance, but soon to be overtaken. As the settlers throng into the lands and seize the good ground, especially that near the streams, the great fenceless ranches, where the cattle and their mounted herdsmen wandered unchecked over hundreds of thousands of acres, will be broken up and divided into corn land, or else into small grazing farms where a few hundred head of stock are closely watched and taken care of. Of course, the most powerful ranches, owned by wealthy corporations or individuals, and already firmly rooted in the soil, will long resist this crowding; in places, where the ground is not suited to agriculture, or where, through the old Spanish land-grants, the title has been acquired to a great tract of territory, cattle ranching will continue for a long time, though in a greatly modified form; elsewhere, I

doubt if it lasts out the present century. Immense sums of money have been made at it in the past, and it is still fairly profitable; but the good grounds (aside from those reserved for the Indians) are now almost all taken up, and it is too late for new men to start at it on their own account, unless in exceptional cases, or where an Indian reservation is thrown open. Those that are now in will continue to make money; but most of those who hereafter take it up will lose.

The profits of the business are great; but the chances for loss are great, also. A winter of unusual severity will work sad havoc among the young cattle, especially the heifers; sometimes a disease, like the Texas cattle-fever, will take off a whole herd; and many animals stray and are not recovered. In fall, when the grass is like a mass of dry and brittle tinder, the fires do much damage, reducing the prairies to blackened deserts as far as the eye can see, and destroying feed which would keep many thousand head of stock during winter. Then we hold in about equal abhorrence the granger who may come in to till the land, and the sheep-owner who drives his flocks over it. The former will gradually fill up the country to our own exclusion, while the latter's sheep nibble the grass off so close to the ground as to starve out all other animals.

Then we suffer some loss—in certain regions,

very severe loss—from wild beasts, such as cougars, wolves, and lynxes. The latter, generally called "bob-cats," merely make inroads on the hen-roosts (one of them destroyed half my poultry, coming night after night with most praiseworthy regularity), but the cougars and wolves destroy many cattle.

The wolf is not very common with us; nothing like as plentiful as the little coyote. A few years ago both wolves and coyotes were very numerous on the plains, and as Indians and hunters rarely molested them, they were then very unsuspicious. But all this is changed now. When the cattlemen came in they soon perceived in the wolves their natural foes, and followed them unrelentingly. They shot at and chased them on all occasions, and killed great numbers by poisoning; and, as a consequence, the comparatively few that are left are as wary and cunning beasts as exist anywhere. They hardly ever stir abroad by day, and hence are rarely shot or indeed seen. During the last three years these brutes have killed nearly a score of my cattle, and in return we have poisoned six or eight wolves and a couple of dozen coyotes; yet in all our riding we have not seen so much as a single wolf, and only rarely a coyote. The coyotes kill sheep and, occasionally, very young calves, but never meddle with anything larger. The stockman fears only the large wolves.

According to my experience, the wolf is rather solitary. A single one or a pair will be found by themselves, or possibly with one or more well-grown young ones, and will then hunt over a large tract where no other wolves will be found; and as they wander very far, and as their melancholy howlings have a most ventriloquial effect, they are often thought to be much more plentiful than they are. During the daytime they lie hid in caves or in some patch of bush, and will let a man pass right by them without betraying their presence. Occasionally, somebody runs across them by accident. A neighboring ranchman to me once stumbled, while riding an unshod pony, right into the midst of four wolves, who were lying in some tall, rank grass, and shot one with his revolver and crippled another before they could get away. But such an accident as this is very rare; and when, by any chance, the wolf is himself abroad in the daytime he keeps such a sharp lookout, and is so wary, that it is almost impossible to get near him, and he gives every human being a wide berth. At night it is different. The wolves then wander far and wide, often coming up round the outbuildings of the ranches; I have seen in light snow the tracks of two that had walked round the house within fifty feet of it. I have never heard of an instance where a man was attacked or threatened by them, but they will at

times kill every kind of domestic animal. They are fond of trying to catch young foals, but do not often succeed, for the mares and foals keep together in a kind of straggling band, and the foal is early able to run at good speed for a short distance. When attacked the mare and foal dash off towards the rest of the band, which gathers together at once, the foals pressing into the middle and the mares remaining on the outside, not in a ring with their heels out, but moving in and out, and forming a solid mass into which the wolves do not venture. Full-grown horses are rarely molested, while a stallion becomes himself the assailant.

In early spring, when the cows are beginning to calve, the wolves sometimes wait upon the herds as they did of old on the buffalo, and snap up any calf that strays away from its mother. When hard pressed by hunger, they will kill a steer or a heifer, choosing the bitterest and coldest night to make the attack. The prey is invariably seized by the haunch or flank, and its entrails afterwards torn out; while a cougar, on the contrary, grasps the neck or throat. Wolves have very strong teeth and jaws and inflict a most severe bite. They will in winter come up to the yards and carry away a sheep, pig, or dog, without much difficulty; I have known one which had tried to seize a sheep, and been prevented by the sheep-dogs, to canter

off with one of the latter instead. But a spirited dog will always attack a wolf. On the ranch next below mine there was a plucky bull terrier, weighing about twenty-five pounds, who lost his life owing to his bravery. On one moonlight night three wolves came round the stable, and the terrier sallied out promptly. He made such a quick rush as to take his opponents by surprise, and seized one by the throat; nor did he let go till the other two tore him almost asunder across the loins. Better luck attended a large mongrel, called a sheep-dog by his master, but whose blood was apparently about equally derived from collie, Newfoundland, and bulldog. He was a sullen but very intelligent and determined brute, powerfully built and with strong jaws, and, though neither as tall nor as heavy as a wolf, he had yet killed two of these animals single-handed. One of them had come into the farmyard at night, and taken a young pig, whose squeals roused everybody. The wolf loped off with his booty, the dog running after him and overtaking him in the darkness. The struggle was short, for the dog had seized the wolf by the throat and the latter could not shake him off, though he made the most desperate efforts, rising on his hind legs and pressing the dog down with his fore paws. This time the victor escaped scatheless, but in his second fight, when he strangled a still larger wolf, he was severely

punished. The wolf had seized a sheep, when the dog, rushing on him, caused him to leave his quarry. Instead of running, he turned to bay at once, taking off one of the assailant's ears with a rapid snap. The dog did not get a good hold, and the wolf scored him across the shoulders and flung him off. They then faced each other for a minute and at the next dash the dog made good his throat hold, and throttled the wolf, though the latter contrived to get his foe's foreleg into his jaws and broke it clear through. When I saw the dog he had completely recovered, although pretty well scarred.

On another neighboring ranch there is a most ill-favored hybrid, whose mother was a Newfoundland and whose father was a large wolf. It is stoutly built, with erect ears, pointed muzzle, rather short head, short bushy tail, and of a brindled color; funnily enough, it looks more like a hyena than like either of its parents. It is familiar with people and a good cattle-dog, but rather treacherous; it both barks and howls. The parent wolf carried on a long courtship with the Newfoundland. He came round the ranch regularly and boldly, every night, and she would at once go out to him. In the daylight he would lie hid in the bushes at some little distance. Once or twice his hiding-place was discovered, and then the men would amuse themselves by setting the

Newfoundland on him. She would make at him, but when they were a good way from the men he would turn round and wait for her and they would go romping off together, not to be seen again for several hours.

The cougar is hardly ever seen round my ranch; but toward the mountains it is very destructive both to horses and horned cattle. The ranchmen know it by the name of mountain lion; and it is the same beast that in the East is called panther or "painter." The cougar is the same size and build as the Old World leopard, and with very much the same habits. One will generally lie in wait for the heifers or young steers as they come down to water, and, singling out an animal, reach it in a couple of bounds and fasten its fangs in the throat or neck. I have seen quite a large cow that had been killed by a cougar; and on another occasion, while out hunting over light snow, I came across a place where two bucks, while fighting, had been stalked up to by a cougar which pulled down one and tore him in pieces. The cougar's gait is silent and stealthy, to an extraordinary degree; the look of the animal when creeping up to his prey has been wonderfully caught by the sculptor, Kemeys, in his bronzes: "The Still Hunt" and "The Silent Footfall."

I have never myself killed a cougar, though my brother shot one in Texas, while still-hunting some

deer, which the cougar itself was after. It never attacks man, and even when hard pressed and wounded turns to bay with extreme reluctance, and at the first chance again seeks safety in flight. This was certainly not the case in old times, but the nature of the animal has been so changed by constant contact with rifle-bearing hunters, that timidity toward them has become a hereditary trait deeply engrained in its nature. When the continent was first settled, and for long afterward, the cougar was quite as dangerous an antagonist as the African or Indian leopard, and would even attack men unprovoked. An instance of this occurred in the annals of my mother's family. Early in the present century, one of my ancestral relatives, a Georgian, moved down to the wild and almost unknown country bordering on Florida. His plantation was surrounded by jungles in which all kinds of wild beasts swarmed. One of his negroes had a sweetheart on another plantation, and in visiting her, instead of going by the road, he took a short cut through the swamps, heedless of the wild beasts, and armed only with a long knife —for he was a man of colossal strength, and of fierce and determined temper. One night he started to return late, expecting to reach the plantation in time for his daily task on the morrow. But he never reached home, and it was thought he had run away. However, when search was

made for him his body was found in the path through the swamp, all gashed and torn, and, but a few steps from him, the body of a cougar, stabbed and cut in many places. Certainly, that must have been a grim fight, in the gloomy, lonely recesses of the swamp, with no one to watch the midnight death-struggle between the powerful, naked man and the ferocious brute that was his almost unseen assailant.

When hungry, a cougar will attack anything it can master. I have known of their killing wolves and large dogs. A friend of mine, a ranchman in Wyoming, had two grizzly bear cubs in his possession at one time, and they were kept in a pen outside the ranch. One night two cougars came down, and after vain efforts to catch a dog which was on the place, leaped into the pen and carried off the two young bears!

Two or three powerful dogs, however, will give a cougar all he wants to do to defend himself. A relative of mine in one of the Southern States had a small pack of five blood-hounds, with which he used to hunt the canebrakes for bear, wildcats, etc. On one occasion they ran across a cougar, and after a sharp chase treed him. As the hunters drew near, he leaped from the tree and made off, but was overtaken by the hounds and torn to pieces after a sharp struggle, in which one or two of the pack were badly scratched.

Cougars are occasionally killed by poisoning, and they may be trapped much more easily than a wolf. I have never known them to be systematically hunted in the West, though now and then one is accidentally run across and killed with the rifle while the hunter is after some other game.

As already said, ranchmen do not have much idle time on their hands, for their duties are manifold, and they need to be ever on the watch against their foes, both animate and inanimate. Where a man has so much to do, he cannot spare a great deal of time for any amusement; but a good part of that which the ranchman can spare he is very apt to spend in hunting. His quarry will be one of the seven kinds of plains game—bear, buffalo, elk, bighorn, antelope, blacktail or whitetail deer. Moose, caribou, and white goat never come down into the cattle country; and it is only on the Southern ranches near the Rio Grande and the Rio Colorado that the truculent peccary and the great spotted jaguar are found.

Until recently, all sporting on the plains was confined to army officers, or to men of leisure who made extensive trips for no other purpose; leaving out of consideration the professional hunters, who trapped and shot for their livelihood. But with the incoming of the cattlemen, there grew up a a class of residents, men with a stake in the welfare

of the country, and with a regular business carried on in it, many of whom were keenly devoted to sport,—a class whose members were in many respects closely akin to the old Southern planters. In this book I propose to give some description of the kind of sport that can be had by the average ranchman who is fond of the rifle. Of course, no man with a regular business can have such opportunities as fall to the lot of some who pass their lives in hunting only; and we cannot pretend to equal the achievements of such men, for with us it is merely a pleasure, to be eagerly sought after when we have the chance, but not to be allowed to interfere with our business. No ranchmen have time to make such extended trips as are made by some devotees of sport who are so fortunate as to have no everyday work to which to attend. Still, ranch life undoubtedly offers more chances to a man to get sport than is now the case with any other occupation in America, and those who follow it are apt to be men of game spirit, fond of excitement and adventure, who perforce lead an open-air life, who must needs ride well, for they are often in the saddle from sunrise to sunset, and who naturally take kindly to that noblest of weapons, the rifle. With such men hunting is one of the chief of pleasures; and they follow it eagerly when their work will allow them. And with some of them it is at times more

than a pleasure. On many of the ranches—on my own, for instance—the supply of fresh meat depends mainly on the skill of the riflemen, and so, both for pleasure and profit, most ranchmen do a certain amount of hunting each season. The buffalo are now gone forever, and the elk are rapidly sharing their fate; but antelope and deer are still quite plenty, and will remain so for some years; and these are the common game of the plainsman. Nor is it likely that the game will disappear much before ranch life itself is a thing of the past. It is a phase of American life as fascinating as it is evanescent, and one well deserving an historian. But in these pages I propose to dwell on only one of its many pleasant sides, and to give some idea of the game-shooting which forms perhaps the chief of the cattleman's pleasures, aside from those more strictly connected with his actual work. I have to tell of no unusual adventures, but merely of just such hunting as lies within reach of most of the sport-loving ranchmen whose cattle range along the waters of the Powder and the Bighorn, the Little Missouri and the Yellowstone.

Of course I have never myself gone out hunting under the direction of a professional guide or professional hunter, unless it was to see one of the latter who was reputed a crack shot; all of my trips have been made either by myself or

else with one of my cowboys as a companion. Most of the so-called hunters are not worth much. There are plenty of men hanging round the frontier settlements who claim to be hunters, and who bedizen themselves in all the traditional finery of the craft, in the hope of getting a job at guiding some "tenderfoot"; and there are plenty of skin-hunters, or meat-hunters, who, after the Indians have been driven away and when means of communication have been established, mercilessly slaughter the game in season and out, being too lazy to work at any regular trade, and keeping on hunting until the animals become too scarce and shy to be taken without more skill than they possess; but these are all mere temporary excrescences, and the true old Rocky Mountain hunter and trapper, the plainsman, or mountain man, who, with all his faults, was a man of iron nerve and will, is now almost a thing of the past. In the place of these heroes of a bygone age, the men who were clad in buckskin and who carried long rifles, stands, or rather rides, the bronzed and sinewy cowboy, as picturesque and self-reliant, as dashing and resolute as the saturnine Indian fighters whose place he has taken; and, alas that it should be written! he in his turn must at no distant time share the fate of the men he has displaced. The ground over which he so gallantly rides his small, wiry horse will soon know

him no more, and in his stead there will be the plodding grangers and husbandmen. I suppose it is right and for the best that the great cattle country, with its broad extent of fenceless land, over which the ranchman rides as free as the game that he follows or the horned herds that he guards, should be in the end broken up into small patches of fenced farm land and grazing land; but I hope against hope that I myself shall not live to see this take place, for when it does one of the pleasantest and freest phases of Western American life will have come to an end.

The old hunters were a class by themselves. They penetrated, alone or in small parties, to the farthest and wildest haunts of the animals they followed, leading a solitary, lonely life, often never seeing a white face for months and even years together. They were skilful shots, and were cool, daring, and resolute to the verge of recklessness. On anything like even terms, they very greatly overmatched the Indians by whom they were surrounded, and with whom they waged constant and ferocious war. In the government expeditions against the plains tribes they were of absolutely invaluable assistance as scouts. They rarely had regular wives or white children, and there are none to take their places, now that the greater part of them have gone. For the men who carry on hunting as a business where it is perfectly

safe have all the vices of their prototypes, but, not having to face the dangers that beset the latter, so neither need nor possess the stern, rough virtues that were required in order to meet and overcome them. The ranks of the skin-hunters and meat-hunters contain some good men; but, as a rule, they are a most unlovely race of beings, not excelling even in the pursuit which they follow because they are too shiftless to do anything else; and the sooner they vanish the better.

A word as to weapons and hunting-dress. When I first came to the plains I had a heavy Sharps rifle, 45–120, shooting an ounce and a quarter of lead, and a 50-calibre, double-barrelled English express. Both of these, especially the latter, had a vicious recoil; the former was very clumsy; and, above all, they were neither of them repeaters; for a repeater or magazine-gun is as much superior to a single- or double-barrelled breech-loader as the latter is to a muzzle-loader. I threw them both aside: and have instead a 40–90 Sharps for very long range work; a 50–115 6-shot Ballard express, which has the velocity, shock, and low trajectory of the English gun; and, better than either, a 45–75 half-magazine Winchester. The Winchester, which is stocked and sighted to suit myself, is by all odds the best weapon I ever had, and I now use it almost exclusively, having killed every kind of game with it, from a grizzly bear to a big-

horn. It is as handy to carry, whether on foot or on horseback, and comes up to the shoulder as readily as a shot-gun; it is absolutely sure, and there is no recoil to jar and disturb the aim, while it carries accurately quite as far as a man can aim with any degree of certainty; and the bullet, weighing three quarters of an ounce, is plenty large enough for anything on this continent. For shooting the very large game (buffalo, elephants, etc.) of India and South Africa, much heavier rifles are undoubtedly necessary; but the Winchester is the best gun for any game to be found in the United States, for it is as deadly, accurate, and handy as any, stands very rough usage, and is unapproachable for the rapidity of its fire and the facility with which it is loaded.

Of course, every ranchman carries a revolver, a long 45 Colt or Smith & Wesson, by preference the former. When after game a hunting-knife is stuck in the girdle. This should be stout and sharp, but not too long, with a round handle. I have two double-barrelled shot-guns: a No. 10 choke-bore for ducks and geese, made by Thomas of Chicago; and a No. 16 hammerless, built for me by Kennedy of St. Paul, for grouse and plover. On regular hunting trips, I always carry the Winchester rifle, but in riding round near home, where a man may see a deer and is sure to come across ducks and grouse, it is best to take the little ranch

gun, a double-barrel No. 16, with a 40–70 rifle underneath the shot-gun barrels.

As for clothing, when only off on a day's trip the ordinary ranchman's dress is good enough: flannel shirt and overalls tucked into alligator boots, the latter being of service against the brambles, cacti, and rattlesnakes. Such a costume is good in warm weather. When making a long hunting trip, where there will be much rough work, especially in the dry cold of fall and winter, there is nothing better than a fringed buckskin tunic or hunting-shirt (held in at the waist by the cartridge belt), buckskin trousers, and a fur cap, with heavy moccasins for use in the woods, and light alligator-hide shoes if it is intended to cross rocks and open ground. Buckskin is most durable, keeps out wind and cold, and is the best possible color for the hunter—no small point in approaching game. For wet, it is not as good as flannel, and it is hot in warm weather. On very cold days, fur gloves and either a coonskin overcoat or a short riding-jacket of fisher's fur may be worn. In cold weather, if travelling light with only what can be packed behind the horse, I sleep in a big buffalo-robe, sewed up at the sides and one end into the form of a bag, and very warm. When, as is sometimes the case, the spirit in the thermometer sinks to — 60°–65° Fahrenheit, it is necessary to have more wraps and bedding, and we

use beaver-robes and bearskins. An oilskin "slicker" or waterproof overcoat and a pair of shaps keep out the rain almost completely.

Where most of the hunting is done on horseback the hunting-pony is a very important animal. Many people seem to think that any broken-down pony will do to hunt, but this seems to me a very great mistake. My own hunting-horse, Manitou, is the best and most valuable animal on the ranch. He is stoutly built and strong, able to carry a good-sized buck behind his rider for miles at a lope without minding it in the least; he is very enduring and very hardy, not only picking up a living but even growing fat when left to shift for himself under very hard conditions; and he is perfectly sure-footed and as fast as any horse on the river. Though both willing and spirited, he is very gentle, with an easy mouth, and will stay grazing in one spot when left, and will permit himself to be caught without difficulty. Add to these virtues the fact that he will let any dead beast or thing be packed on him, and will allow a man to shoot off his back or right by him without moving, and it is evident that he is as nearly perfect as can be the case with hunting-horseflesh. There is a little sorrel mare on the ranch, a perfect little pet, that is almost as good, but too small. We have some other horses we frequently use, but all have faults. Some of the quiet ones

are slow, lazy, or tire easily; others are gun-shy; while others plunge and buck if we try to pack any game on their backs. Others cannot be left standing untied, as they run away; and I can imagine few forms of exercise so soul-harrowing as that of spending an hour or two in running, in shaps, top-boots, and spurs, over a broken prairie, with the thermometer at 90°, after an escaped horse. Most of the hunting-horses used by my friends have one or more of these tricks, and it is rare to find one, like Manitou, who has none of them. Manitou is a treasure, and I value him accordingly. Besides, he is a sociable old fellow, and a great companion when off alone, coming up to have his head rubbed or to get a crust of bread, of which he is very fond.

To be remarkably successful in killing game, a man must be a good shot; but a good target-shot may be a very poor hunter, and a fairly successful hunter may be only a moderate shot. Shooting well with the rifle is the highest kind of skill, for the rifle is the queen of weapons; and it is a difficult art to learn. But many other qualities go to make up the first-class hunter. He must be persevering, watchful, hardy, and with good judgment; and a little dash and energy at the proper time often help him immensely. I myself am not, and never will be, more than an ordinary shot; for my eyes are bad and my hand not over-

steady; yet I have killed every kind of game to be found on the plains, partly because I have hunted very perseveringly, and partly because by practice I have learned to shoot about as well at a wild animal as at a target. I have killed rather more game than most of the ranchmen who are my neighbors, though at least half of them are better shots than I am.

Time and again I have seen a man who had, as he deemed, practised sufficiently at a target, come out "to kill a deer" hot with enthusiasm; and nine out of ten times he has gone back unsuccessful, even when deer were quite plenty. Usually, he has been told by the friend who advised him to take the trip, or by the guide who inveigled him into it, that "the deer were so plenty you saw them all round you," and, this not proving quite true, he lacks perseverance to keep on; or else he fails to see the deer at the right time; or else, if he does see it he misses it, making the discovery that to shoot at a gray object, not over distinctly seen, at a distance merely guessed at, and with a background of other gray objects, is very different from firing into a target, brightly painted and a fixed number of yards off. A man must be able to hit a bull's-eye eight inches across every time to do good work with deer or other game; for the spot around the shoulders that is fatal is not much bigger than this; and a shot a little back of that

merely makes a wound which may in the end prove mortal, but which will in all probability allow the animal to escape for the time being. It takes a good shot to hit a bull's-eye offhand several times in succession at a hundred yards, and if the bull's-eye was painted the same color as the rest of the landscape, and was at an uncertain distance, and, moreover, was alive, and likely to take to its heels at any moment, the difficulty of making a good shot would be greatly enhanced. The man who can kill his buck right along at a hundred yards has a right to claim that he is a good shot. If he can shoot offhand standing up, that is much the best way, but I myself always drop on one knee, if I have time, unless the animal is very close. It is curious to hear the nonsense that is talked and to see the nonsense that is written about the distance at which game is killed. Rifles now carry with deadly effect the distance of a mile, and most middle-range hunting-rifles would at least kill at half a mile; and in war firing is often begun at these ranges. But in war there is very little accurate aiming, and the fact that there is a variation of thirty or forty feet in the flight of the ball makes no difference; and, finally, a thousand bullets are fired for every man that is killed—and usually many more than a thousand. How would that serve for a record on game? The truth is that three hundred yards is a very long

shot, and that even two hundred yards is a long shot. On looking over my game-book I find that the average distance at which I have killed game on the plains is less than a hundred and fifty yards. A few years ago, when the buffalo would stand still in great herds half a mile from the hunter, the latter, using a long-range Sharps rifle, would often, by firing a number of shots into the herd at that distance, knock over two or three buffalo; but I have hardly ever known single animals to be killed six hundred yards off, even in antelope hunting, the kind in which most long-range shooting is done; and at half that distance a very good shot, with all the surroundings in his favor, is more apt to miss than to hit. Of course old hunters—the most inveterate liars on the face of the earth—are all the time telling of their wonderful shots at even longer distances, and they do occasionally, when shooting very often, make them, but their performances, when actually tested, dwindle amazingly. Others, amateurs, will brag of their rifles. I lately read in a magazine about killing antelopes at eight hundred yards with a Winchester express, a weapon which cannot be depended upon at over two hundred, and is wholly inaccurate at over three hundred, yards.

The truth is that in almost all cases the hunter merely guesses at the distance, and, often

perfectly honestly, just about doubles it in his own mind. Once a man told me of an extraordinary shot by which he killed a deer at four hundred yards. A couple of days afterward we happened to pass the place, and I had the curiosity to step off the distance, finding it a trifle over a hundred and ninety. I always make it a rule to pace off the distance after a successful shot, whenever practicable—that is, when the animal has not run too far before dropping—and I was at first both amused and somewhat chagrined to see how rapidly what I had supposed to be remarkably long shots shrank under actual pacing. It is a good rule always to try to get as near the game as possible, and in most cases it is best to risk startling it in the effort to get closer rather than to risk missing it by a shot at long range. At the same time, I am a great believer in powder-burning, and if I cannot get near, will generally try a shot anyhow, if there is a chance of the rifle's carrying to it. In this way a man will now and then, in the midst of many misses, make a very good long shot, but he should not try to deceive himself into the belief that these occasional long shots are to be taken as samples of his ordinary skill. Yet it is curious to see how a really truthful man will forget his misses, and his hits at close quarters, and, by dint of constant repetition, will finally persuade himself that he is in the habit of killing his game

at three or four hundred yards. Of course, in different kinds of ground the average range for shooting varies. In the Bad Lands most shots will be obtained much closer than on the prairie, and in the timber they will be nearer still.

Old hunters, who are hardy, persevering, and well acquainted with the nature of the animals they pursue, will often kill a great deal of game without being particularly good marksmen; besides, they are careful to get up close, and are not flurried at all, shooting as well at a deer as they do at a target. They are, as a rule, fair shots—that is, they shoot a great deal better than Indians or soldiers, or than the general run of Eastern amateur sportsmen; but I have never been out with one who has not missed a great deal, and the "Leatherstocking" class of shooting stories are generally untrue, at least to the extent of suppressing part of the truth—that is, the number of misses. Beyond question, our Western hunters are, as a body, to the full as good marksmen as, and probably much better than, any other body of men in the world, not even excepting the Dutch Boers or Tyrolese Jägers, and a certain number of them who shoot a great deal at game, and are able to squander cartridges very freely, undoubtedly become crack shots, and perform really wonderful feats. As an instance, there is old "Vic," a former scout and Indian fighter, and concededly the

best hunter on the Little Missouri; probably there are not a dozen men in the West who are better shots or hunters than he is, and I have seen him do most skilful work. He can run the muzzle of his rifle through a board so as to hide the sights and yet do quite good shooting at some little distance; he will cut the head off a chicken at eighty or ninety yards, shoot a deer running through brush at that distance, kill grouse on the wing early in the season, and knock over antelopes when they are so far off that I should not dream of shooting. He firmly believes, and so do most men that speak of him, that he never misses. Yet I have known him make miss after miss at game, and some that were not especially difficult shots either. One secret of his success is his constant practice. He is firing all the time, at marks, small birds, etc., and will average from fifty to a hundred cartridges a day; he certainly uses nearly twenty thousand a year, while a man who only shoots for sport, and that occasionally, will, in practising at marks and everything else, hardly get through with five hundred. Besides, he was cradled in the midst of wild life, and has handled a rifle and used it against both brute and human foes almost since his infancy; his nerves and sinews are like iron, and his eye is naturally both quick and true.

Vic is an exception. With practice an ama-

teur will become nearly as good a shot as the average hunter; and, as I said before, I do not myself believe in taking out a professional hunter as a shooting companion. If I do not go alone I generally go with one of my foremen, Merrifield, who himself came from the East but five years ago. He is a good-looking fellow, daring and self-reliant, a good rider and a first-class shot, and a very keen sportsman. Of late years he has been my *fidus Achates* of the hunting field. I can kill more game with him than I can alone; and in hunting on the plains there are many occasions on which it is almost a necessity to have a companion along.

It frequently happens that a solitary hunter finds himself in an awkward predicament, from which he could be extricated easily enough if there were another man with him. His horse may fall into a wash-out, or may get stuck in a mud-hole or quicksand in such a manner that a man working by himself will have great difficulty in getting it out; and two heads often prove better than one in an emergency, especially if a man gets hurt in any way. The first thing that a Western plainsman has to learn is the capacity for self-help, but at the same time he must not forget that occasions may arise when the help of others will be most grateful.

## CHAPTER II

### WATERFOWL

ONE cool afternoon in the early fall, while sitting on the veranda of the ranch-house, we heard a long way off the ha-ha-honk, ha-honk, of a gang of wild geese; and shortly after they came in sight, in a V-shaped line, flying low and heavily toward the south, along the course of the stream. They went by within a hundred yards of the house, and we watched them for some minutes as they flew up the valley, for they were so low in the air that it seemed certain that they would soon alight; and alight they did when they were less than a mile past us. As the ground was flat and without much cover where they had settled, I took the rifle instead of a shot-gun and hurried after them on foot. Wild geese are very watchful and wary, and as I came toward the place where I thought they were I crept along with as much caution as if the game had been a deer. At last, peering through a thick clump of bullberry bushes, I saw them. They were clustered on a high sand-bar in the middle of the river, which here ran in a very wide bed between low banks. The only way to get at them was to

crawl along the river-bed, which was partly dry, using the patches of rushes and the sand hillocks and driftwood to shield myself from their view. As it was already late and the sun was just sinking, I hastily retreated a few paces, dropped over the bank, and began to creep along on my hands and knees through the sand and gravel. Such work is always tiresome, and is especially so when done against time. I kept in line with a great log washed up on the shore, which was some seventy-five yards from the geese. On reaching it and looking over I was annoyed to find that in the fading light I could not distinguish the birds clearly enough to shoot, as the dark river bank was behind them. I crawled quickly back a few yards, and went off a good bit to the left into a hollow. Peeping over the edge I could now see the geese, gathered into a clump with their necks held straight out, sharply outlined against the horizon; the sand flats stretching out on either side, while the sky above was barred with gray and faint crimson. I fired into the thickest of the bunch, and as the rest flew off, with discordant clamor, ran forward and picked up my victim, a fat young wild goose (or Canada goose), the body badly torn by the bullet.

On two other occasions I have killed geese with the rifle. Once while out riding along the river bottoms, just at dawn, my attention was drawn

to a splashing and low cackling in the stream, where the water deepened in a wide bend, which swept round a low bluff. Leaving my horse where he was, I walked off towards the edge of the stream, and lying on the brink of the bank looked over into the water of the bend. Only a faint streak of light was visible in the east, so that objects on the water could hardly be made out; and the little wreaths of mist that rose from the river made the difficulty even greater. The birds were some distance above me, where the water made a long straight stretch through a sandy level. I could not see them, but could plainly hear their low murmuring and splashing, and once one of them, as I judged by the sound, stood up on end and flapped its wings vigorously. Pretty soon a light puff of wind blew the thin mist aside, and I caught a glimpse of them; as I had supposed, they were wild geese, five of them, swimming slowly, or rather resting on the water, and being drifted down with the current. The fog closed over them again, but it was growing light very rapidly, and in a short time I knew they would be in the still water of the bend just below me, so I rose on my elbows and held my rifle ready at poise. In a few minutes, before the sun was above the horizon, but when there was plenty of light by which to shoot, another eddy in the wind blew away the vapor and showed the five geese in a cluster, some

thirty yards off. I fired at once, and one of the geese, kicking and flapping frantically, fell over, its neck half cut from the body, while the others, with laborious effort, got under way. Before they could get their heavy bodies fairly off the water and out of range, I had taken three more shots, but missed. Waiting till the dead goose drifted in to shore, I picked it up and tied it on the saddle of my horse to carry home to the ranch. Being young and fat it was excellent eating.

The third goose I killed with the rifle was of a different kind. I had been out after antelopes, starting before there was any light in the heavens, and pushing straight out towards the rolling prairie. After two or three hours, when the sun was well up, I neared where a creek ran in a broad, shallow valley. I had seen no game, and before coming up to the crest of the divide beyond which lay the creek bottom, I dismounted and crawled up to it, so as to see if any animal had come down to drink. Field-glasses are almost always carried while hunting on the plains, as the distances at which one can see game are so enormous. On looking over the crest with the glasses the valley of the creek for about a mile was stretched before me. At my feet the low hills came closer together than in other places, and shelved abruptly down to the bed of the valley, where there was a small grove of box-alders and cottonwoods. The beavers

had, in times gone by, built a large dam at this place across the creek, which must have produced a great back-flow and made a regular little lake in the times of freshets. But the dam was now broken, and the beavers, or most of them, gone, and in the place of the lake was a long green meadow. Glancing towards this my eye was at once caught by a row of white objects stretched straight across it, and another look showed me that they were snow-geese. They were feeding, and were moving abreast of one another slowly down the length of the meadow towards the end nearest me, where the patch of small trees and brushwood lay. A goose is not as big game as an antelope; still I had never shot a snow-goose, and we needed fresh meat, so I slipped back over the crest and ran down to the bed of the creek, round a turn of the hill, where the geese were out of sight. The creek was not an entirely dry one, but there was no depth of water in it except in certain deep holes; elsewhere it was a muddy ditch with steep sides, difficult to cross on horseback because of the quicksands. I walked up to the trees without any special care, as they screened me from view, and looked cautiously out from behind them. The geese were acting just as our tame geese act in feeding on a common, moving along with their necks stretched out before them, nibbling and jerking at the grass as they tore it up by mouthfuls.

They were very watchful, and one or the other of them had its head straight in the air looking sharply round all the time. Geese will not come near any cover in which foes may be lurking if they can help it, and so I feared that they would turn before coming near enough to the brush to give me a good shot. I therefore dropped into the bed of the creek, which wound tortuously along the side of the meadow, and crept on all fours along one of its banks until I came to where it made a loop out towards the middle of the bottom. Here there was a tuft of tall grass, which served as a good cover, and I stood upright, dropping my hat, and looking through between the blades. The geese, still in a row, with several yards' interval between each one and his neighbor, were only sixty or seventy yards off, still feeding towards me. They came along quite slowly, and the ones nearest, with habitual suspicion, edged away from the scattered tufts of grass and weeds which marked the brink of the creek. I tried to get two in line, but could not. There was one gander much larger than any other bird in the lot, though not the closest to me; as he went by just opposite my hiding-place, he stopped still, broadside to me, and I aimed just at the root of the neck—for he was near enough for any one firing a rifle from a rest to hit him about where he pleased. Away flew the others, and in a few

minutes I was riding along with the white gander dangling behind my saddle.

The beaver meadows spoken of above are not common, but, until within the last two or three years, beavers themselves were very plentiful, and there are still a good many left. Although only settled for so short a period, the land has been known to hunters for half a century, and throughout that time it has at intervals been trapped over by whites or half-breeds. If fur was high and the Indians peaceful quite a number of trappers would come in, for the Little Missouri Bad Lands were always famous both for fur and game; then if fur went down, or an Indian war broke out, or if the beaver got pretty well thinned out, the place would be forsaken and the animals would go unmolested for perhaps a dozen years, when the process would be repeated. But the incoming of the settlers and the driving out of the Indians have left the ground clear for the trappers to work over unintermittently, and the extinction of the beaver throughout the plains country is a question of but a short time. Excepting an occasional otter or mink, or a few muskrats, it is the only fur-bearing animal followed by the Western plains trapper; and its large size and the marked peculiarities of its habits, together with the accessibility of its haunts on the plains, as compared with its haunts in the deep

woods and mountains, render its pursuit and capture comparatively easy. We have trapped (or occasionally shot) on the ranch during the past three years several score of beaver; the fur is paler and less valuable than in the forest animal. Those that live in the river do not build dams all across it, but merely extending up some distance against the current, so as to make a deep pool or eddy, beside which are the burrows and houses. It would seem to be a simple feat to break into a beaver house, but in reality it needs no little toil with both spade and axe, for the house has very thick roof and walls, made of clay and tough branches, twisted together into a perfect mat, which, when frozen, can withstand anything but the sharpest and best of tools. At evening beaver often come out to swim, and by waiting on the bank perfectly quietly for an hour or so a close shot can frequently be obtained.

Beaver are often found in the creeks, not only in those which always contain running water, but also in the dry ones. Here they build dams clean across, making ponds which always contain water, even if the rest of the bed is almost dry; and I have often been surprised to find fresh traces of beaver in a pond but a few feet across, a mile away from any other body of water. On one occasion I was deer-hunting in a rough, broken country, which was little more than a tangle of ravines and clefts,

with very steep sides rising into sharp hills. The sides of the ravines were quite densely overgrown with underbrush and young trees, and through one or two of them ran, or rather trickled, small streams, but an inch or two in depth, and often less. Directly across one of these ravines, at its narrowest and steepest part, the beaver had built an immense, massive dam, completely stopping the course of a little brooklet. The dam was certainly eight feet high, and strong enough and broad enough to cross on horseback; and it had turned back the stream until a large pond, almost a little lake, had been formed by it. This was miles from any other body of water, but, judging from the traces of their work, it had once held a large colony of beavers; when I saw it they had all been trapped out, and the pond had been deserted for a year and over. Though clumsy on dry ground, and fearing much to be caught upon it, yet beaver can make, if necessary, quite long overland journeys, and that at a speed with which it will give a man trouble to keep up.

As there are few fish in the plains streams, otters are naturally not at all common, though occasionally we get one. Muskrats are quite plenty in all the pools of water. Sometimes a little pool out on the prairie will show along its edges numerous traces of animal life; for, though of small extent, and a long distance from other water, it may be the

home of beavers and muskrats, the breeding-place of different kinds of ducks, and the drinking-place for the denizens of the dry country roundabouts, such as wolves, antelopes, and badgers.

Although the plains country is in most places very dry, yet there are here and there patches of prairie land where the reverse is true. One such is some thirty miles distant from my ranch. The ground is gently rolling, in some places almost level, and is crossed by two or three sluggish, winding creeks, with many branches, always holding water, and swelling out into small pools and lakelets wherever there is a hollow. The prairie round about is wet, at times almost marshy, especially at the borders of the great reedy slews. These pools and slews are favorite breeding-places for waterfowl, especially for mallard, and a good bag can be made at them in the fall, both among the young flappers (as tender and delicious birds for the table as any I know), and among the flights of wild duck that make the region a stopping-place on their southern migration. In these small pools, with little cover round the edges, the poor flappers are at a great disadvantage; we never shoot them unless we really need them for the table. But quite often, in August or September, if near the place, I have gone down to visit one or two of the pools, and have brought home half a dozen flappers, killed with the rifle if I had

been out after large game, or with the revolver if I had merely been among the cattle,—each duck, in the latter case, representing the expenditure of a vast number of cartridges.

Later in the fall, when the young ducks are grown and the flocks are coming in from the north, fair shooting may be had by lying in the rushes on the edge of some large pond, and waiting for the evening flight of the birds; or else by taking a station on some spot of low ground across which the ducks fly in passing from one sheet of water to another. Frequently quite a bag of mallard, widgeon, and pintail can be made in this manner, although nowhere in the Bad Lands is there any such duck-shooting as is found farther east. Ducks are not very easy to kill, or even to hit, when they fly past. My duck-gun, the No. 10 choke-bore, is a very strong and close shooting piece, and such a one is needed when the strong-flying birds are at any distance; but the very fact of its shooting so close makes it necessary that the aim should be very true; and as a consequence my shooting at ducks has varied from bad to indifferent, and my bags have been always small.

Once I made an unusually successful right and left, however. In late summer and early fall large flocks of both green-winged and blue-winged teal are often seen both on the ponds and on the river, flying up and down the latter. On one oc-

casion while out with the wagon we halted for the midday meal on the bank of the river. Travelling across the plains in company with a wagon, especially if making a long trip, as we were then doing, is both tiresome and monotonous. The scenery through the places where the wagon must go is everywhere much the same, and the pace is very slow. At lunch time I was glad to get off the horse, which had been plodding along at a walk for hours, and stretch my muscles; and noticing a bunch of teal fly past and round a bend in the river, I seized the chance for a little diversion, and taking my double-barrel, followed them on foot. The banks were five or six feet high, edged with a thick growth of cottonwood saplings; so the chance to creep up was very good. On getting round the bend I poked my head through the bushes, and saw that the little bunch I was after had joined a great flock of teal, which was on a sand-bar in the middle of the stream. They were all huddled together, some standing on the bar, and others in the water right by it, and I aimed for the thickest part of the flock. At the report they sprang into the air, and I leaped to my feet to give them the second barrel, when from under the bank right beneath me, two shoveller or spoon-bill ducks rose, with great quacking, and, as they were right in line, I took them instead, knocking both over. When I had fished

out the two shovellers, I waded over to the sand bar and picked up eleven teal, making thirteen ducks with the two barrels.

On one occasion my brother and myself made a short wagon trip in the level, fertile, farming country, whose western edge lies many miles to the east of the Bad Lands around my ranch. There the land was already partially settled by farmers, and we had one or two days' quite fair duck-shooting. It was a rolling country of mixed prairie land and rounded hills, with small groves of trees and numerous little lakes in the hollows. The surface of the natural prairie was broken in places by great wheat fields, and when we were there the grain was gathered in sheaves and stacks among the stubble. At night-time we either put up at the house of some settler, or, if there were none round, camped out.

One night we had gone into camp among the dense timber fringing a small river, which wound through the prairie in a deep narrow bed with steep banks. Until people have actually camped out themselves it is difficult for them to realize how much work there is in making or breaking camp. But it is very quickly done if every man has his duties assigned to him and starts about doing them at once In choosing camp there are three essentials to be looked to—wood, water, and grass The last is found everywhere in the East-

ern prairie land, where we were on our duck-shooting trip, but in many places on the great dry plains farther west, it is either very scanty or altogether lacking; and I have at times been forced to travel half a score miles farther than I wished to get feed for the horses. Water, again, is a commodity not by any means to be found everywhere on the plains. If the country is known and the journeys timed aright, water can easily be had, at least at the night camps, for on a pinch a wagon can be pushed along thirty miles or so at a stretch, giving the tough ponies merely a couple of hours' rest and feed at midday; but in going through an unknown country it has been my misfortune on more than one occasion to make a dry camp—that is, one without any water either for men or horses, and such camps are most uncomfortable. The thirst seems to be most annoying just after sundown; after one has gotten to sleep and the air has become cool, he is not troubled much by it again until within two or three hours of noon next day, when the chances are that he will have reached water, for of course by that time he will have made a desperate push to get to it. When found it is more than likely to be bad, being either from a bitter alkaline pool, or from a hole in a creek, so muddy that it can only be called liquid by courtesy. On the great plains wood is even scarcer, and at least half the time the only

material from which to make a fire will be buffalo chips and sage-brush; the long roots of the latter if dug up make a very hot blaze Of course when wood is so scarce the fire is a small one, used merely to cook by, and is not kept up after the cooking is over.

When a place with grass, wood, and water is found, the wagon is driven up to the windward side of where the beds are to be laid, and the horses are unhitched, watered, and turned out to graze freely until bedt me, when a certain number of them are picketed or hobbled. If danger from white or red horse-thieves is feared, a guard is kept over them all night. The ground is cleared of stones and cacti where the beds are to be placed, and the blankets and robes spread. Generally we have no tent, and the wagon-cover is spread over all to keep out rain. Meanwhile some one gathers the wood and starts a fire. The coffee-pot is set among the coals, and the frying-pan with bacon and whatever game has been shot is placed on top. Like Eastern backwoodsmen, all plains-men fry about everything that they can get hold of to cook; for my own use I always have a broiler carried along in the wagon. One evening in every three or four is employed in baking bread in the Dutch oven; if there is no time for this, biscuits are made in the frying-pan. The food carried along is very simple, consisting of bacon, flour, coffee,

sugar, baking-powder, and salt; for all else we depend on our guns. On a long trip every old hand carries a water-proof canvas bag, containing his few spare clothes and necessaries; on a short trip a little oilskin one, for the tooth-brush, soap, towel, etc., will do.

On the evening in question our camping-ground was an excellent one; we had no trouble about anything, except that we had to bring water to the horses in pails, for the banks were too steep and rotten to get them down to the river. The beds were made under a great elm, and in a short time the fire was roaring in front of them, while the tender grouse were being roasted on pointed sticks. One of the pleasantest times of camping out is the period immediately after supper, when the hunters lie in the blaze of the firelight, talking over what they have done during the day and making their plans for the morrow. And how soundly a man who has worked hard sleeps in the open, none but he who has tried it knows.

Before we had risen in the morning, when the blackness of the night had barely changed to gray, we were roused by the whistle of wings, as a flock of ducks flew by along the course of the stream, and lit in the water just above the camp. Some kinds of ducks in lighting strike the water with their tails first, and skitter along the surface for a few feet before settling down. Lying in our

blankets we could plainly hear all the motions: first of all, the whistle—whistle of their wings; then a long-drawn splash-h-h—plump; and then a low, conversational quacking. It was too dark to shoot, but we got up and ready, and strolled down along the brink of the river opposite where we could hear them; and as soon as we could see we gave them four barrels and picked up half a dozen scaup-ducks. Breakfast was not yet ready, and we took a turn out on the prairie before coming back to the wagon. In a small pool, down in a hollow, were a couple of little dipper ducks or buffle-heads; they rose slowly against the wind, and offered such fair marks that it was out of the question to miss them.

The evening before we had lain among the reeds near a marshy lake and had killed quite a number of ducks, mostly widgeon and teal; and this morning we intended to try shooting among the cornfields. By sunrise we were a good distance off, on a high ridge, across which we had noticed that the ducks flew in crossing from one set of lakes to another. The flight had already begun, and our arrival scared off the birds for the time being; but in a little while, after we had hidden among the sheaves, stacking the straw up around us, the ducks began to come back, either flying over in their passage from the water, or else intending to light and feed. They were for

the most part mallards, which are the commonest of the Western ducks, and the only species customarily killed in this kind of shooting. They are especially fond of the corn, of which there was a small patch in the grain field. To this flocks came again and again, and fast though they flew we got many before they left the place, scared by the shooting. Those that were merely passing from one point to another flew low, and among them we shot a couple of gadwall, and also knocked over a red-head from a little bunch that went by, their squat, chunky forms giving them a very different look from the longer, lighter-built mallard. The mallards that came to feed flew high in the air, wheeling round in gradually lowering circles when they had reached the spot where they intended to light. In shooting in the grain fields there is usually plenty of time to aim, a snap shot being from the nature of the sport exceptional. Care must be taken to lie quiet until the ducks are near enough; shots are most often lost through shooting too soon. Heavy guns with heavy loads are necessary, for the ducks are generally killed at long range; and both from this circumstance as well as from the rapidity of their flight, it is imperative to hold well ahead of the bird fired at. It has one advantage over shooting in a marsh, and that is that a wounded bird which drops is of course hardly ever lost. Corn-fed

mallards are most delicious eating; they rank on a par with teal and red-head, and second only to the canvas-back—a bird, by the way, of which I have never killed but one or two individuals in the West.

In going out of this field we got a shot at a gang of wild geese. We saw them a long way off, coming straight toward us in a head and tail line. Down we dropped, flat on our faces, remaining perfectly still without even looking up (for wild geese are quick to catch the slightest motion) until the sound of the heavy wing strokes and the honking seemed directly overhead. Then we rose on our knees and fired all four barrels, into which we had slipped buckshot cartridges. They were away up in the air, much beyond an ordinary gunshot; and we looked regretfully after them as they flew off. Pretty soon one lagged a little behind; his wings beat slower; suddenly his long neck dropped, and he came down like a stone, one of the buckshot having gone clean through his breast.

We had a long distance to make that day, and after leaving the grain fields travelled pretty steadily, only getting out of the wagon once or twice after prairie chickens. At lunch time we halted near a group of small ponds and reedy sloughs. In these were quite a number of teal and wood-duck, which were lying singly, in pairs,

or small bunches, on the edges of the reeds, or where there were thick clusters of lily pads; and we had half an hour's good sport in "jumping" these little ducks, moving cautiously along the margin of the reeds, keeping as much as possible concealed from view, and shooting four teal and a wood-duck, as frightened at our near approach, they sprang into the air and made off. Late in the evening, while we were passing over a narrow neck of land that divided two small lakes, with reedy shores, from each other, a large flock of the usually shy pintail duck passed over us at close range, and we killed two from the wagon, making in all a bag of twenty-one and a half couple of waterfowl during the day, two thirds falling to my brother's gun. Of course this is a very small bag indeed compared to those made in the Chesapeake, or in Wisconsin and the Mississippi valley; but the day was so perfect, and there were so many varieties of shooting, that I question if any bag, no matter how large, ever gave much more pleasure to the successful sportsman than did our forty-three ducks to us.

Though ducks fly so fast, and need such good shooting to kill them, yet their rate of speed, as compared to that of other birds, is not so great as is commonly supposed. Hawks, for instance, are faster. Once, on the prairie, I saw a mallard singled out of a flock, fairly overtaken, and struck

down, by a large, light-colored hawk, which I supposed to be a lanner, or at any rate one of the long-winged falcons; and I saw a duck hawk, on the coast of Long Island, perform a similar feat with the swift-flying long-tailed duck—the old squaw, or sou'-sou'-southerly, of the baymen. A more curious instance was related to me by a friend. He was out along a river, shooting ducks as they flew by him, and had noticed a bald eagle perched on the top of a dead tree some distance from him. While looking at it a little bunch of teal flew swiftly by, and to his astonishment the eagle made after them. The little ducks went along like bullets, their wings working so fast that they whistled; flop, flop came the great eagle after them, with labored-looking flight; and yet he actually gained so rapidly on his seemingly fleeter quarry that he was almost up to them when opposite my friend. Then the five teal went down headlong into the water, diving like so many shot. The eagle kept hovering over the spot, thrusting with its claws at each little duck as it came up; but he was unsuccessful, all of the teal eventually getting into the reeds, where they were safe. In the East, by the way, I have seen the same trick of hovering over the water where a flock of ducks had disappeared, performed by a Cooper's hawk. He had stooped at some nearly grown flappers of the black duck; they all

went under water, and he remained just above, grasping at any one that appeared, and forcing them to go under without getting a chance to breathe. Soon he had singled out one, which kept down a shorter and shorter time at each dive; it soon grew exhausted, was a little too slow in taking a dive, and was grasped in the claws of its foe.

In duck-shooting where there are reeds, grass, and water-lilies, the cripples should be killed at once, even at the cost of burning some additional powder, many kinds of waterfowl being very expert at diving. Others, as widgeon, shoveller, and teal, do not dive, merely trying to hide in some hole in the bank; and these are generally birds that fall to the touch of shot much more easily than is the case with their tougher relatives.

There are two or three species of birds, tolerably common over the plains, which we do not often regularly hunt, but which are occasionally shot for the table. These are the curlew, the upland or grass plover, and the golden plover. All three kinds belong to the family of what are called wading birds; but with us it is rare to see any one of them near water.

The curlew is the most conspicuous; indeed its loud, incessant clamor, its erect carriage, and the intense curiosity which possesses it, and which makes it come up to circle around any strange

object, all combine to make it in springtime one of the most conspicuous features of plains life. At that time curlews are seen in pairs or small parties, keeping to the prairies and grassy uplands. They are never silent, and their discordant noise can be heard half a mile off. Whenever they discover a wagon or a man on horseback, they fly toward him, though usually taking good care to keep out of gunshot. They then fly over and round the object, calling all the time, and sometimes going off to one side, where they will light and run rapidly through the grass; and in this manner they will sometimes accompany a hunter or traveller for miles, scaring off all game. By the end of July or August they have reared their young; they then go in small flocks, and are comparatively silent, and are very good eating. I have never made a practice of shooting them, though I have fired at them sometimes with the rifle, and in this way have now and then killed one; twice I have hit them on the wing with this weapon, while they were soaring slowly about above me, occasionally passing pretty near.

The grass plover is found in the same places as the curlew, and, like it, breeds with us. Its flesh is just as good, and it has somewhat the same habits, but is less wary, noisy, and inquisitive. The golden plover is only found during the migrations, when large flocks may sometimes be

seen. They are delicious eating; the only ones I have ever shot have been killed with the little ranch gun, when riding round the ranch, or travelling from one point to another.

Like the grouse and other ground-nesting birds, the curlews and plovers during breeding time have for their chief foes the coyotes, badgers, skunks, and other flesh-eating prowlers; and as all these are greatly thinned off by the cattlemen, with their firearms and their infinitely more deadly poison, the partial and light settlement of the country that accompanies the cattle industry has had the effect of making all these birds more plentiful than before; and, most unlike the large game, game birds bid fair to increase in numbers during the next few years.

The skunks are a nuisance in more ways than one. They are stupid, familiar beasts, with a great predilection for visiting camps, and the shacks or huts of the settlers, to pick up any scraps of meat that may be lying round. I have time and again known a skunk to actually spend several hours of the night in perseveringly digging a hole underneath the logs of a hut, so as to get inside among the inmates. The animal then hunts about among them, and of course no one will willingly molest it; and it has often been known to deliberately settle down upon and begin to eat one of the sleepers. The strange and terrible

thing about these attacks is that in certain districts and at certain times the bite of the skunk is surely fatal, producing hydrophobia; and many cowmen, soldiers, and hunters have annually died from this cause. There is no wild beast in the West, no matter what its size and ferocity, so dreaded by our plainsmen as this seemingly harmless little beast.

I remember one rather ludicrous incident connected with a skunk. A number of us, among whom was a huge happy-go-lucky Scotchman, who went by the name of Sandy, were sleeping in a hut, when a skunk burrowed under the logs and got in. Hearing it moving about among the tin pans Sandy struck a light, was much taken by the familiarity of the pretty black and white little animal, and, as it seemed in his eyes a curiosity, took a shot at it with his revolver. He missed; the skunk, for a wonder, retired promptly without taking any notice of the attack; and the rest of the alarmed sleepers, when informed of the cause of the shot, cursed the Scotchman up hill and down dale for having so nearly brought dire confusion on them all. The latter took the abuse very philosophically, merely remarking: "I'm glad a did na kill him mysel'; he seemed such a dácent wee beastie." The sequel proved that neither the skunk nor Sandy had learned any wisdom by the encounter, for half an hour later the "dacent

wee beastie" came back, and this time Sandy fired at him with fatal effect. Of course, the result was a frantic rush of all hands from the hut, Sandy exclaiming with late but sincere repentance: "A did na ken 't wad cause such a tragadee."

Besides curlew and plover, there are, at times, especially during the migrations, a number of species of other waders to be found along the streams and pools in the cattle region. Yellow legs, yelper, willet, marlin, dough bird, stilt, and avocet are often common, but they do not begin to be as plentiful as they are in the more fertile lands to the eastward, and the ranchmen never shoot at them or follow them as game birds.

A more curious bird than any of these is the plains plover, which avoids the water and seems to prefer the barren plateaus and almost desert-like reaches of sage-brush and alkali. Plains plovers are pretty birds, and not at all shy. In fall they are fat and good eating, but they are not plentiful enough to be worth going after. Sometimes they are to be seen in the most seemingly unlikely places for a wader to be. Last spring one pair nested in a broken piece of Bad Lands near my ranch, where the ground is riven and twisted into abrupt, steep crests and deep canyons. The soil is seemingly wholly unfitted to support bird life, as it is almost bare of vegetation, being

covered with fossil plants, shells, fishes, etc.—all of which objects, by the way, the frontiersman, who is much given to broad generalization, groups together under the startling title of "stone clams."

## CHAPTER III

### THE GROUSE OF THE NORTHERN CATTLE PLAINS

TO my mind, there is no comparison between sport with the rifle and sport with the shot-gun. The rifle is the freeman's weapon. The man who uses it well in the chase shows that he can at need use it also in war with human foes. I would no more compare the feat of one who bags his score of ducks or quail with that of him who fairly hunts down and slays a buck or bear, than I would compare the skill necessary to drive a buggy with that required to ride a horse across country; or the dexterity acquired in handling a billiard cue with that shown by a skilful boxer or oarsman. The difference is not one of degree; it is one of kind.

I am far from decrying the shot-gun. It is always pleasant as a change from the rifle, and in the Eastern States it is almost the only firearm which we now have a chance to use. But out in the cattle country it is the rifle that is always carried by the ranchman who cares for sport. Large game is still that which is sought after, and most of the birds killed are either simply slaughtered for the pot, or else shot for the sake of variety, while

really after deer or antelope; though every now and then I have taken a day with the shot-gun after nothing else but prairie fowl.

The sharp-tailed prairie fowl is much the most plentiful of the feathered game to be found on the northern cattle plains, where it replaces the common prairie chicken so abundant on the prairies to the east and southeast of the range of our birds. In habits, it is much like the latter, being one of the grouse which keeps to the open, treeless tracts, though it is far less averse to timber than is its nearest relative, and often is found among the cottonwood trees and thick brush which fringe the streams. I have never noticed that its habits, when pursued, differ much from those of the common prairie chicken, though it is perhaps a little more shy, and is certainly much more apt to light on a tree, like the ruffed grouse. It is, however, essentially a bird of the wilds, and it is a curious fact that it is seen to retreat before civilization, continually moving westward as the wheat fields advance, while its place is taken by the common form, which seems to keep pace with the settlement of the country. Like the latter bird, and unlike the ruffed grouse and blue grouse, which have white meat, its flesh is dark, and it is very good eating from about the middle of August to the middle of November, after which it is a little tough.

As already said, the ranchmen do not often make a regular hunt after these grouse. This is partly because most of them look with something akin to contempt upon any firearm but the rifle or revolver, and partly because it is next to impossible to keep hunting-dogs very long on the plains. The only way to check, in any degree, the ravages of the wolves is by the most liberal use of strychnine, and the offal of any game killed by a cattleman is pretty sure to be poisoned before being left, while the "wolfer," or professional wolf-killer, strews his bait everywhere. It thus comes about that any dog who is in the habit of going any distance from the house is almost sure to run across and eat some of the poisoned meat, the effect of which is almost certain death. The only time I have ever shot sharp-tailed prairie fowl over dogs was during a trip to the eastward with my brother, which will be described farther on. Out on the plains, I have occasionally taken a morning with the shot-gun after them, but more often have either simply butchered them for the pot, when out of meat, or else have killed a few with the rifle when I happened to come across them while after deer or antelope.

Occasions frequently arise, in living a more or less wild life, when a man has to show his skill in shifting for himself; when, for instance, he has to go out and make a foray upon the grouse, neither

for sport, nor yet for a change of diet, but actually for food. Under such circumstances, he, of course, pays no regard to the rules of sport which would govern his conduct on other occasions. If a man's dinner for several consecutive days depends upon a single shot, he is a fool if he does not take every advantage he can. I remember, for instance, one time when we were travelling along the valley of the Powder River, and got entirely out of fresh meat, owing to my making a succession of ludicrously bad misses at deer. Having had my faith in my capacity to kill anything whatever with the rifle a good deal shaken, I started off one morning on horseback with the shot-gun. Until nearly noon I saw nothing; then, while riding through a barren-looking bottom, I happened to spy some prairie fowl squatting close to the ground underneath a sage-brush. It was some minutes before I could make out what they were, they kept so low and so quiet, and their color harmonized so well with their surroundings. Finally, I was convinced that they were grouse, and rode my horse slowly by them. When opposite, I reined him in and fired, killing the whole bunch of five birds. Another time, at the ranch our supply of fresh meat gave out entirely, and I sallied forth with the ranch gun, intent, not on sport, but on slaughter. It was late fall, and as I rode along in the dawn (for the sun was not

up) a small pack of prairie-fowl passed over my head and lit on a dead tree that stood out some little distance from a grove of cottonwoods. They paid little attention to me, but they are so shy at that season that I did not dare to try to approach them on foot, but let the horse jog on at the regular cow-pony gait,—a kind of single-foot pace, between a walk and a trot,—and as I passed by fired into the tree and killed four birds. Now, of course, I would not have dreamed of taking either of these shots had I been out purely for sport, and neither needed any more skill than would be shown in killing hens in a barn-yard; but, after all, when one is hunting for one's dinner he takes an interest in his success which he would otherwise lack, and on both occasions I felt a most unsportsmanlike glee when I found how many I had potted.

The habits of this prairie-fowl vary greatly at different seasons of the year. It is found pretty much everywhere within moderate distance of water, for it does not frequent the perfectly dry wastes where we find the great sage-cock. But it is equally at home on the level prairie and among the steep hills of the Bad Lands. When on the ground it has rather a comical look, for it stands very high on its legs, carries its sharp little tail cocked up like a wren's and when startled stretches its neck out straight; altogether, it gives one the

impression of being a very angular bird. Of course, it crouches, and moves about when feeding, like any other grouse.

One of the strangest, and to me one of the most attractive, sounds of the prairie is the hollow booming made by the cocks in spring. Before the snow has left the ground they begin, and at the break of morning their deep resonant calls sound from far and near, for in still weather they can be heard at an immense distance. I hardly know how to describe the call; indeed it cannot be described in words. It has a hollow, vibrant sound, like that of some wind instrument, and would hardly be recognized as a bird note at all. I have heard it at evening, but more often shortly after dawn; and I have often stopped and listened to it for many minutes, for it is as strange and weird a form of natural music as any I know. At the time of the year when they utter these notes the cocks gather together in certain places and hold dancing rings, posturing and strutting about as they face and pass each other.

The nest is generally placed in a tuft of grass or under a sage-brush in the open, but occasionally in the brush wood near a stream. The chicks are pretty little balls of mottled brown and yellow down. The mother takes great care of them, leading them generally into some patch of brushwood, but often keeping them out in the deep

grass. Frequently, when out among the cattle, I have ridden my horse almost over a hen with a brood of chicks. The little chicks first attempt to run off in single file; if discovered, they scatter and squat down under clods of earth or tufts of grass. Holding one in my hand near my pocket, it scuttled into it like a flash. The mother, when she sees her brood discovered, tumbles about through the grass as if wounded, in the effort to decoy the foe after her. If she is successful in this, she takes a series of short flights, keeping just out of reach of her pursuer, and when the latter has been lured far enough from the chicks the hen rises and flies off at a humming speed.

By the middle of August the young are well enough grown to shoot, and are then most delicious eating. Different coveys at this time vary greatly in their behavior if surprised feeding in the open. Sometimes they will not permit a very close approach, and will fly off after one or two have been shot; while, again, they will show perfect indifference to the approach of man, and will allow the latter to knock off the heads of five or six with his rifle before the rest take the alarm and fly off. They now go more or less over the open ground, but are especially fond of frequenting the long grass in the bottoms of the coulies and ravines and the dense brush along the edges of the creeks and in the valleys; there they will

invariably be found at midday, and will lie till they are almost trodden on before rising.

Late in the month of August one year we had been close-herding a small bunch of young cattle on a bottom about a mile square, walled in by bluffs, and with, as an inlet, a long, dry creek running back many miles into the Bad Lands, where it branched out into innumerable smaller creeks and coulies. We wished to get the cattle accustomed to the locality, for animals are more apt to stray when first brought on new ground than at any later period; so each night we "bedded" them on the level bottom—that is, gathering them together on the plain, one of us would ride slowly and quietly round and round the herd, heading off and turning back into it all beasts that tried to stray off, but carefully avoiding disturbing them or making any unusual noise; and by degrees they would all lie down, close together. This "bedding down" is always done when travelling with a large herd, when, of course, it needs several cowboys to do it; and in such cases some of the cowboys keep guard all the time, walking their horses round the herd, and singing and calling to the cattle all night long. The cattle seem to like to hear the human voice, and it tends to keep them quiet and free from panic. Often when camping near some great cattle outfit I have lain awake at night for an hour or over listening

to the wild, not unmusical calls of the cowboys as they rode round the half-slumbering steers. In the clear, still night air the calls can be heard for a mile and more, and I like to listen to them as they come through the darkness, half-mellowed by the distance, for they are one of the characteristic sounds of plains life. Texan steers often give considerable trouble before they can be bedded, and are prone to stampede, especially in a thunder-storm. But with the little herd we were at this time guarding there was no difficulty whatever, the animals being grade shorthorns of Eastern origin. After seeing them quiet, we would leave them for the night, again riding out early in the morning.

On every occasion when we thus rode out in the morning we saw great numbers of prairie-fowl feeding in the open plain in small flocks, each evidently composed of a hen and her own brood. They would often be right round the cattle, and went indifferently among the sage-brush or out on the short prairie grass. They flew into the bottom from some distance off about daybreak, fed for a couple of hours, and soon after sunrise again took wing and flew up along the course of the dry creek mentioned above. While on the bottom they were generally quite shy, not permitting anything like a close approach before taking wing. Their habit of crowing or clucking while

flying off is very noticeable; it is, by the way, a most strongly characteristic trait of this species. I have been especially struck by it when shooting in Minnesota, where both the sharp-tail and the common prairie-fowl are found; the contrast between the noisiness of one bird and the quiet of the other was very marked. If one of us approached a covey on horseback, the birds would, if they thought they were unobserved, squat down close to the ground; more often they would stand very erect, and walk off. If we came too close to one it would utter a loud kuk-kuk-kuk, and be off, at every few strokes of its wings repeating the sound—a kind of crowing cluck. This is the note they utter when alarmed, or when calling to one another. When a flock are together and undisturbed, they keep up a sociable, garrulous cackling.

Every morning, by the time the sun had been up a little while, the grouse had all gone from the bottom, but later in the day, while riding along the creek among the cattle, we often stumbled upon little flocks. We fired at them with our revolvers whenever we were close enough, but the amount we got in this way was very limited, and as we were rather stinted for fresh meat, the cattle taking up so much of our time as to prevent our going after deer, I made up my mind to devote a morning to hunting up the creeks and coulies for grouse, with the shot-gun.

Accordingly, the next morning I started, just about the time the last of the flocks were flying away from their feeding-grounds on the bottom. I trudged along on foot, not wanting to be bothered by a horse. The air was fresh and cool, though the cloudless sky boded a hot noon. As I walked by the cattle they stopped grazing and looked curiously at me, for they were unused to seeing any man not on horseback. But they did not offer to molest me; Texan or even Northern steers bred on the more remote ranges will often follow and threaten a footman for miles. While passing among the cattle, it was amusing to see the actions of the little cow-buntings. They were very familiar little birds, lighting on the backs of the beasts, and keeping fluttering round their heads as they walked through the grass, hopping up into the air all the time. At first, I could not make out what they were doing; but on watching them closely, saw that they were catching the grasshoppers and moths which flew into the air to avoid the cattle's hoofs. They are as tame with horsemen; while riding through a patch of tall grass a flock of buntings will often keep circling within a couple of yards of the horse's head, seizing the insects as they fly up before him.

The valley through which the creek ran was quite wide, bordered by low buttes. After a heavy rainfall the water rushes through the at other

times dry bed in a foaming torrent, and it thus cuts it down into a canyon-like shape, making it a deep, winding narrow ditch, with steep sides. Along the edges of this ditch were dense patches, often quite large, of rose-bushes, bull-berry bushes, ash, and wild cherry, making almost impenetrable thickets, generally not over breast high. In the bottom of the valley, along the edges of the stream-bed, the grass was long and coarse, entirely different from the short fine bunch-grass a little farther back, the favorite food of the cattle.

Almost as soon as I had entered the creek, in walking through a small patch of brush I put up an old cock, as strong a flyer as the general run of October birds. Off he went, with a whirr, clucking and crowing; I held the little 16-bore fully two feet ahead of him, pulled the trigger, and down he came into the bushes. The sharp-tails fly strongly and steadily, springing into the air when they rise, and then going off in a straight line, alternately sailing and giving a succession of rapid wing-beats. Sometimes they will sail a long distance with set wings before alighting, and when they are passing overhead with their wings outstretched each of the separate wing feathers can be seen, rigid and distinct.

Picking up and pocketing my bird, I walked on, and on turning round a shoulder of the bluffs saw

a pair of sharp-tails sitting sunning themselves on the top of a bullberry bush. As soon as they saw me they flew off a short distance and lit in the bed of the creek. Rightly judging that there were more birds than those I had seen I began to beat with great care the patches of brush and long grass on both sides of the creek, and soon was rewarded by some very pretty shooting. The covey was a large one, composed of two or three broods of young prairie-fowl, and I had struck on the exact place, a slight hollow filled with low brush and tall grass, where they were lying. They lay very close, and my first notice of their presence was given by one that I almost trod on, which rose from fairly between my feet. A young grouse at this season offers an easy shot, and he was dropped without difficulty. At the report two others rose and I got one. When I had barely reloaded the rest began to get up, singly or two or three at a time, rising straight up to clear the edge of the hollow, and making beautiful marks; when the last one had been put up I had down seven birds, of which I picked up six, not being able to find the other. A little farther I put up and shot a single grouse, which fell into a patch of briars I could not penetrate. Then for some time I saw nothing, although beating carefully through every likely looking place. One patch of grass, but a few feet across, I walked

directly through without rousing anything; happening to look back, when I had gone some fifty yards, I was surprised to see a dozen heads and necks stretched up, and eyeing me most inquisitively; their owners were sharp-tails, a covey of which I had almost walked over without their making a sign. I strode back; but at my first step they all stood up straight, with their absurd little tails held up in the air, and at the next step away they went, flying off a quarter of a mile and then scattering in the bushy hollows where a coulie headed up into the buttes. (Grouse at this season hardly ever light in a tree.) I marked them down carefully and tramped all through the place, yet I only succeeded in putting up two, of which I got one and missed the other with both barrels. After that I walked across the heads of the coulies but saw nothing except in a small swale of high grass, where there was a little covey of five of which I got two with a right and left. It was now very hot, and I made for a spring which I knew ran out of a cliff a mile or two off. There I stayed till long after the shadows began to lengthen, when I started homeward. For some miles I saw nothing, but as the evening came on the grouse began to stir. A small party flew over my head, and though I missed them with both barrels, either because I miscalculated the distance or

for some other reason, yet I marked them down very well, and when I put them up again got two. Three times afterward I came across coveys, either flying or walking out from the edges of the brushes, and I got one bird out of each, reaching home just after sunset with fifteen sharp-tails strung over my back. Of course, working after grouse on an August day in this manner, without a dog, is very tiring, and no great bag can be made without a pointer or setter.

In September, the sharp-tails begin to come out from the brushy coulies and creek bottoms, and to wander out among the short grass of the ravines and over the open prairie. They are at first not very shy, and in the early part of the month I have once or twice had good sport with them. Once I took a companion in the buckboard, and drove during the course of the day twenty or twenty-five miles along the edge of the rolling prairie, crossing the creeks and skirting the wooded basins where the Bad Lands began. We came across quite a number of coveys, which in almost all cases waited for us to come up, and as the birds did not rise all together, I got three or four shots at each covey, and came home with ten and a half couple.

A little later the birds become shy and acquire their full strength of wing. They now wander far out on the prairie, and hardly ever make any

effort to squat down and conceal themselves in the marvellous way which they have earlier in the season, but, on the contrary, trust to their vigilance and their powers of flight for their safety. On bare ground it is now impossible to get anywhere near them, but if they are among sagebrush or in other low cover they afford fine sport to a good shot, with a close-shooting, strong-hitting gun. I remember one evening, while coming over with a wagon-team from the head waters of O'Fallon Creek, across the Big Sandy, when it became a matter of a good deal of interest for us to kill something, as otherwise we would have had very little to eat. We had camped near a succession of small pools, containing one or two teal, which I shot; but a teal is a small bird when placed before three hungry men. Sharp-tails, however, were quite numerous, having come in from round about, as evening came on, to drink. They were in superb condition, stout and heavy, with clean, bright plumage, but very shy; and they rose so far off and flew so strongly and swiftly that a good many cartridges were spent before four of the plump, white-bellied birds were brought back to the wagon in my pockets.

Later than this they sometimes unite into great packs containing hundreds of individuals, and then show a strong preference for the timbered ravines and the dense woods and underbrush of

the river bottoms, the upper branches of the trees being their favorite resting-places. On very cold mornings, when they are feeling numb and chilled, a man can sometimes get very close up to them, but as a rule they are very wild, and the few I have killed at this season of the year have been shot with the rifle, either from a tree or when standing out on the bare hillsides, at a considerable distance. They offer very pretty marks for target practice with the rifle, and it needs a good shot to hit one at eighty or a hundred yards.

But, though the shot-gun is generally of no use late in the season, yet last December I had a good afternoon's sport with it. There was a light snow falling, and having been in the house all the morning, I determined to take a stroll out in the afternoon with the shot-gun. A couple of miles from the house was a cedar canyon—that is, a canyon one of whose sides was densely wooded with gnarled, stunted evergreens. This had been a favorite resort for the sharp-tails for some time, and it was especially likely that they would go to it during a storm, as it afforded fine shelter, and also food. The buttes bounding it on the side where the trees were, rose to a sharp crest, which extended along, with occasional interruptions, for over a mile, and by walking along near this and occasionally looking out over it, I judged I would get up close to the grouse, while the falling snow

and the wind would deaden the report of the gun, and not let it scare all the prairie-fowl out of the canyon at the first fire. It came out as I had planned and expected. I climbed up to the crest near the mouth of the gorge, braced myself firmly, and looked over the top. At once a dozen sharp-tails, who had perched in the cedar tops almost at my feet, took wing, crossed over the canyon, and as they rose all in a bunch to clear the opposite wall I fired both barrels into the brown, and two of the birds dropped down to the bottom of the ravine. They fell on the snow-covered open ground, where I could easily find them again, and as it would have been a great and useless labor to have gone down for them, I left them where they were and walked on along the crest. Before I had gone a hundred yards I had put up another sharp-tail from a cedar and killed him in fine style as he sailed off below me. The snow and bad weather seemed to make the prairie-fowl disinclined to move. There must have been a good many score of them scattered in bunches among the cedars, and as I walked along I put up a covey or a single bird every two or three hundred yards. They were always started when I was close up to them, and the nature of the place made them offer excellent shots as they went off, while, when killed, they dropped down on the snow-covered canyon bottom, where they could

be easily recovered on my walk home. When the sharp-tails had once left the canyon, they scattered among the broken buttes. I tried to creep up to one or two, but they were fully as wild and watchful as deer, and would not let me come within a hundred yards of them; so I turned back climbed down into the canyon, and walked homeward through it, picking up nine birds on the way, the result of a little over an hour's shooting. Most of them were dead outright; and the two or three who had been only wounded were easily followed by the tracks they made in the tell-tale snow.

Most of the prairie-fowl I have killed, however, have not been obtained in the course of a day or an afternoon regularly spent after them for the sake of sport, but have simply been shot with whatever weapon came handy, because we actually needed them for immediate use. On more than one occasion I would have gone supperless or dinnerless had it not been for some of these grouse; and one such instance I will give.

One November, about the middle of the month, we had driven in a beef herd (which we wished to ship to the cattle-yards) round the old cantonment building, in which a few years ago troops had been stationed to guard against Indian outbreaks. Having taken care of the beef herd, I determined to visit a little bunch of cattle which was some

thirty-five miles down the river, under the care of one of my men—a grizzled old fellow, born in Maine, whose career had been varied to an extent only possible in America, he having successively followed the occupations of seaman, druggist, clerk, buffalo hunter, and cowboy.

I intended to start about noon, but there was so much business to settle that it was an hour and a half afterwards before I put spurs to the smart little cow-pony and loped briskly down the valley. It was a sharp day, the mercury well down towards zero; and the pony, fresh and untired, and impatient of standing in the cold, went along at a good rate; but darkness sets in so early at this season that I had not gone many miles before I began to fear that I would not reach the shack by nightfall. The well-beaten trail followed along the bottoms for some distance and then branched out into the Bad Lands, leading up and down through the ravines and over the ridge crests of some very rough and broken country, and crossing a great level plateau, over which the wind blew savagely, sweeping the powdery snow clean off of the bent blades of short brown grass After making a wide circle of some twelve miles, the trail again came back to the Little Missouri, and led along the bottoms between the rows of high bluffs, continually crossing and recrossing the river. These crossings

were difficult and disagreeable for the horse, as they always are when the ice is not quite heavy enough to bear. The water had not frozen until two or three days before, and the cold snap had not yet lasted long enough to make the ice solid, besides which it was covered with about half an inch of light snow that had fallen, concealing all bad-looking places. The ice, after bearing the cautiously stepping pony for a few yards, would suddenly break and let him down to the bottom, and he would then have to plunge and paw his way through to the opposite shore. Often it is almost impossible to make a pony attempt the crossing under such difficulties; and I have seen ponies which had to be knocked down and pulled across glare ice on their sides. If the horse slips and falls it is a serious matter to the rider; for a wetting in such cold weather, with a long horseback journey to make, is no joke.

I was still several miles from the hut I was striving to reach when the sun set; and for some time previous the valley had been in partial darkness, though the tops of the sombre bluffs around were still lit up. The pony loped steadily on along the trail, which could be dimly made out by the starlight. I hurried the willing little fellow all I could without distressing him, for, though I knew the road pretty well, yet I doubted if I could find it easily in perfect darkness; and the clouds were

gathering overhead with a rapidity which showed that the starlight would last but a short while. The light snow rendered the hoof-beats of my horse muffled and indistinct; and almost the only sound that broke the silence was the long-drawn, melancholy howling of a wolf, a quarter of a mile off. When we came to the last crossing the pony was stopped and watered; and we splashed through over a rapid where the ice had formed only a thin crust. On the opposite side was a large patch of cottonwoods, thickly grown up with underbrush, the whole about half a mile square. In this was the cowboy's shack, but as it was now pitch dark I was unable to find it until I rode clean through to the cow-corral, which was out in the open on the other side. Here I dismounted, grouped around till I found the path, and then easily followed it to the shack.

Rather to my annoyance, the cowboy was away, having run out of provisions, as I afterwards learned; and, of course, he had left nothing to eat behind him. The tough little pony was, according to custom, turned loose to shift for himself; and I went into the low, windowless hut, which was less than twelve feet square. In one end was a great chimney place, and it took but a short time to start a roaring fire which speedily made the hut warm and comfortable. Then I went down to the river with an axe and a pail, and got some

water; I had carried a paper of tea in my pocket, and the tea-kettle was soon simmering away. I should have liked something to eat, but as I did not have it, the tea did not prove such a bad substitute for a cold and tired man.

Next morning I sallied out at break of day with the rifle, for I was pretty hungry. As soon as I stepped from the hut I could hear the prairie-fowl crowing and calling to one another from the tall trees. There were many score—many hundreds would perhaps be more accurate—scattered through the wood. Evidently they had been attracted by the good cover and by the thick growth of choke-cherries and wild plums. As the dawn brightened, the sharp-tails kept up incessantly their hoarse clucking, and small parties began to fly down from their roosts to the berry-bushes. While perched up among the bare limbs of the trees, sharply outlined against the sky, they were very conspicuous. Generally, they crouched close down, with the head drawn in to the body and the feathers ruffled, but when alarmed or restless they stood up straight with their necks stretched out, looking very awkward. Later in the day, they would have been wild and hard to approach, but I kept out of their sight, and sometimes got two or three shots at the same bird before it flew off. They offered beautiful marks, and I could generally get a rest

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for my rifle, while in the gray morning, before sunrise, I was not very conspicuous myself, and could get up close beneath where they were; so I did not have much trouble in killing five, almost all of them shot very nearly where the neck joins the body, one having the head fairly cut off. Salt, like tea, I had carried with me, and it was not long before two of the birds, plucked and cleaned, were split open and roasting before the fire. And to me they seemed most delicious food, although even in November the sharp-tails, while keeping their game flavor, have begun to be dry and tough, most unlike the tender and juicy young of August and September.

The best day's work I ever did after sharp-tails was in the course of the wagon-trip, already mentioned, which my brother and I made through the fertile farming country to the eastward. We had stopped over night with a Norwegian settler, who had taken and adapted to a farmhouse an old log trading-post of one of the fur companies, lying in the timber which fringed a river, and so stoutly built as to have successfully withstood the assaults of Time. We were travelling in a light, covered wagon, in which we could drive anywhere over the prairie. Our dogs would have made an eastern sportsman blush, for, when roughing it in the West we have to put up with any kind of mongrel makeshift, and the best dog gets pretty

well battered after a season or two. I never had a better duck-retriever than a little yellow cur, with hardly a trace of hunting blood in his veins. On this occasion we had a stiff-jointed old pointer with a stub tail, and a wild young setter pup, tireless and ranging very free (a Western dog on the prairies should cover five times the ground necessary for an Eastern one to get over), but very imperfectly trained.

Half of the secret of success on a shooting-trip lies in getting up early and working all day; and this at least we had learned, for we were off as soon as there was light enough by which to drive. The ground, of course, was absolutely fenceless, houses being many miles apart. Through the prairie, with its tall grass, in which the sharp-tails lay at night and during the day, were scattered great grain fields, their feeding-grounds in the morning and evening. Our plan was to drive from one field to another, getting out at each and letting the dogs hunt it over. The birds were in small coveys and lay fairly well to the dogs, though they rose much farther off from us in the grain fields than they did later in the day, when we flushed them from the tall grass of the prairie (I call it tall grass in contradistinction to the short bunch-grass of the cattle plains to the westward). Old stub-tail, though slow, was very staunch and careful, never flushing a bird, while the puppy,

from pure heedlessness, and with the best intentions, would sometimes bounce into the midst of a covey before he knew of their presence. On the other hand, he covered twice the ground that the pointer did. The actual killing the birds was a good deal like quail-shooting in the East, except that it was easier, the marks being so much larger. When we came to a field we would beat through it a hundred yards apart, the dogs ranging in long diagonals. When either the setter or the pointer came to a stand, the other generally backed him. If the covey was near enough, both of us—otherwise, whichever was closest—walked cautiously up. The grouse generally flushed before we came up to the dog, rising all together, so as to give only a right and left.

When the morning was well advanced, the grouse left the stubble fields and flew into the adjoining prairie. We marked down several coveys into one spot, where the ground was rolling and there were here and there a few bushes in the hollows. Carefully hunting over this, we found two or three coveys and had excellent sport out of each. The sharp-tails in these places lay very close, and we had to walk them up, when they rose one at a time, and thus allowed us shot after shot; whereas, as already said, earlier in the day we merely got a quick right and left at each covey. At least half the time we were shooting in

our rubber overcoats, as the weather was cloudy and there were frequent flurries of rain.

We rested a couple of hours at noon for lunch, and the afternoon's sport was simply a repetition of the morning's, except that we had but one dog to work with; for, shortly after mid-day, the stub-tailed pointer, for his sins, encountered a skunk, with which he waged prompt and valiant battle—thereby rendering himself, for the balance of the time, wholly useless as a servant and highly offensive as a companion.

The setter pup did well, ranging very freely, but naturally got tired and careless, flushing his birds half the time; and we had to stop when we still had a good hour of daylight left. Nevertheless, we had in our wagon, when we came in at night, a hundred and five grouse, of which sixty-two had fallen to my brother's gun, and forty-three to mine. We would have done much better with more serviceable dogs; besides, I was suffering all day long from a most acute colic, which was anything but a help to good shooting.

Besides the sharp-tail, there is but one kind of grouse found in the northern cattle plains. This is the sage-cock, a bird the size of a young turkey, and, next to the Old World capercailzie or cock of the woods, the largest of the grouse family. It is a handsome bird, with a long pointed tail and black

belly, and is a very characteristic form of the regions which it inhabits.

It is peculiarly a desert grouse, for though sometimes found in the grassy prairies and on the open river bottoms, it seems really to prefer the dry, arid wastes, where the withered-looking sage-brush and the spiny cactus are almost the only plants to be found, and where the few pools of water are so bitterly alkaline as to be nearly undrinkable. It is pre-eminently the grouse of the plains, and, unlike all of its relatives, is never found near trees; indeed, no trees grow in its haunts.

As is the case with the two species of prairie-fowl, the cocks of this great bird become very noisy in the early spring. If a man happens at that season to be out in the dry plains which are frequented by the sage-fowl, he will hear in the morning, before sunrise, the deep, sonorous booming of the cocks, as they challenge one another or call to their mates. This call is uttered in a hollow, bass tone, and can be heard a long distance in still weather; it is difficult to follow up, for it has a very ventriloquial effect.

Unlike the sharp-tail, the habits and haunts of the sage-fowl are throughout the year the same, except that it grows shyer as the season advances, and occasionally wanders a little farther than formerly from its birthplace. It is only found where

the tough, scraggly wild sage abounds, and it feeds for most of the year solely on sage leaves, varying this diet in August and September by quantities of grasshoppers. Curiously enough, it does not possess any gizzard, such as most gallinaceous birds have, but has in its place a membranous stomach, suited to the digestion of its peculiar food.

The little chicks follow their mother as soon as hatched, and she generally keeps them in the midst of some patch of sage-brush so dense as to be almost impenetrable to man or beast. The little fellows skulk and dodge through the crooked stems so cleverly that it is almost impossible to catch them. Early in August, when the brood is well grown, the mother leads them out, and during the next two months they are more often found out on the grassy prairies than is the case at any other season. They do not form into packs like the prairie-fowl as winter comes on, two broods at the outside occasionally coming together; and they then again retire to the more waste parts of the plains, living purely on sage leaves, and keeping closely to the best-sheltered hollows until the springtime.

In the early part of the season, the young, and, indeed, their parents also, are tame and unsuspicious to the very verge of stupidity, and at this time are often known by the name of "fool-hens" among the frontiersmen. They grow shyer as the

season advances, and after the first of October are difficult to approach, but even then are rarely as wild as the sharp-tails.

It is commonly believed that the flesh of the sage-fowl is uneatable, but this is very far from being the truth, and, on the contrary, it is excellent eating in August and September, when grasshoppers constitute their chief food, and, if the birds are drawn as soon as shot, is generally perfectly palatable at other seasons of the year. The first time I happened to find this out was on the course of a trip, taken with one of my foremen as a companion, through the arid plains to the westward of the Little Missouri. We had been gone for two or three days and camped by a mud hole, which was almost dry, what water it still held being almost as thick as treacle. Our luxuries being limited, I bethought me of a sage-cock which I had shot during the day and had hung to the saddle. I had drawn it as soon as it was picked up, and I made up my mind to try how it tasted. A good deal to our surprise, the meat, though dark and coarse-grained, proved perfectly well flavored, and was quite as good as wild-goose, which it much resembled. Some young sage-fowl, shot shortly afterward, proved tender and juicy, and tasted quite as well as sharp-tails. All of these birds had their crops crammed with grasshoppers, and doubtless the nature of their food

had much to do with their proving so good for the table. An old bird, which had fed on nothing but sage, and was not drawn when shot, would, beyond question, be very poor eating. Like the spruce grouse and the two kinds of prairie-fowl, but unlike the ruffed grouse and blue grouse, the sage-fowl has dark meat.

In walking and running on the ground, sage-fowl act much like common hens, and can skulk through the sage-brush so fast that it is often difficult to make them take wing. When surprised, they will sometimes squat flat down with their heads on the ground, when it is very difficult to make them out, as their upper parts harmonize curiously in color with the surroundings. I have never known of their being shot over a dog, and, indeed, the country where they are found is so dry and difficult that no dog would be able to do any work in it.

When flushed, they rise with a loud whirring, laboring heavily, often clucking hoarsely; when they get fairly under way, they move along in a strong, steady flight, sailing most of the time, but giving, every now and then, a succession of powerful wing-beats, and their course is usually sustained for a mile or over before they light. They are very easy marks, but require hard hitting to bring them down, for they are very tenacious of life. On one occasion, I came upon a flock and

shot an old cock through the body with the rifle. He fell over, fluttering and kicking, and I shot a young one before the rest of the flock rose. To my astonishment, the old cock recovered himself and made off after them, actually flying for half a mile before he dropped. When I found him he was quite dead, the ball having gone clean through him. It was a good deal as if a man had run a mile with a large grapeshot through his body.

Most of the sage-fowl I have killed have been shot with the rifle when I happened to run across a covey while out riding, and wished to take two or three of them back for dinner. Only once did I ever make a trip with the shot-gun for the sole purpose of a day's sport with these birds.

This was after having observed that there were several small flocks of sage-fowl at home on a great plateau or high plain, crossed by several dry creeks, which was about eight miles from the cow-camp where I was staying; and I concluded that I would devote a day to their pursuit. Accordingly, one morning I started out on horseback with my double-barrel 10-bore and a supply of cartridges loaded with No. 4 shot; one of my cowboys went with me, carrying a rifle so as to be ready if we ran across any antelope. Our horses were fresh, and the only way to find the birds was to cover as much ground as possible; so as soon as we reached the plateau we loped across it in

parallel lines till we struck one of the creeks, when we went up it, one on each side, at a good gait, and then crossed over to another, where we repeated the operation. It was nearly noon when, while going up the third creek, we ran into a covey of about fifteen sage-fowl, a much larger covey than ordinary. They were down in the bottom of the creek, which here exhibited a formation very common on the plains. Although now perfectly dry, every series of heavy rainfalls changed it into a foaming torrent, which flowed down the valley in sharp curves, eating away the land into perpendicular banks on the outside of each curve. Thus a series of small bottoms was formed, each fronted by a semicircular bluff, highest in the middle, and rising perfectly sheer and straight. At the foot of these bluffs, which varied from six to thirty feet in height, was the bed of the stream. In many of these creeks there will be a growth of small trees by the stream bed, where it runs under the bluffs, and perhaps pools of water will be found in such places even in times of drought. But on the creek where we found the sage-fowl, there were neither trees nor water, and the little bottoms were only covered with stunted sage-brush. Dismounting and leaving my horse with the cowboy, I walked down to the edge of the bottom, which was not more than thirty or forty yards across. The covey retreated into the brush,

some of the birds crouching flat down, while the others walked or ran off among the bushes. They were pretty tame, and rose one at a time as I walked on. They had to rise over the low, semi-circular bluff in front of them, and, it being still early in the season, they labored heavily as they left the ground. I fired just as they topped the bluff, and as they were so close and large, and were going so slowly, I was able to knock over eight birds, hardly moving from my place during the entire time. On our way back we ran into another covey, a much smaller one, on the side of another creek; of these I got a couple; and I got another out of still a third covey, which we found out in the open, but of which the birds all rose and made off together. We carried eleven birds back, most of them young and tender, and all of them good eating.

In shooting grouse we sometimes run across rabbits. There are two kinds of these. One is the little cottontail, almost precisely similar in appearance to the common gray rabbit of the Eastern woods. It abounds in all the patches of dense cover along the river bottoms and in the larger creeks, and can be quite easily shot at all times, but especially when there is any snow on the ground. It is eatable, but hardly ever killed except to poison and throw out as bait for the wolves.

The other kind is the great jack-rabbit. This is a characteristic animal of the plains; quite as much so as the antelope or prairie dog. It is not very abundant, but is found everywhere over the open ground, both on the prairie or those river bottoms which are not wooded, and in the more open valleys and along the gentle slopes of the Bad Lands. Sometimes it keeps to the patches of sage-brush, and in such cases will lie close to the ground when approached; but more often it is found in the short grass, where there is no cover at all to speak of, and relies upon its speed for its safety. It is a comical-looking beast, with its huge ears and long legs, and runs very fast, with a curious lop-sided gait, as if it was off its balance. After running a couple of hundred yards it will generally stop and sit up erect on its haunches to look around and see if it is pursued. In winter it turns snow-white, except that the tips of the ears remain black. The flesh is dry, and I have never eaten it unless I could get nothing else.

Jack-rabbits are not plentiful enough nor valuable enough to warrant a man's making a hunting trip solely for their sakes; and the few that I have shot have been killed with the rifle while out after other game. They offer beautiful marks for target practice when they sit upon their haunches. But though hardly worth powder, they afford excellent sport when coursed with greyhounds,

being very fleet, and when closely pressed able to double so quickly that the dogs shoot by them. For reasons already given, however, it is difficult to keep sporting dogs on the plains, though doubtless in the future coursing with greyhounds will become a recognized Western sport.

This finishes the account of the small game of the northern cattle country. The wild turkey is not found with us; but it is an abundant bird farther south, and eagerly followed by the ranchmen in whose neighborhood it exists. And as it is easily the king of all game birds, and as its pursuit is a peculiarly American form of sport, some account of how it is hunted in the southern plains country may be worth reading. The following is an extract from a letter written to me by my brother, in December, 1875, while he was in Texas, containing an account of some of his turkey-hunting experience in that State. The portion relating how the birds are coursed with greyhounds is especially markworthy; it reminds one of the method of killing the great bustard with gazehounds, as described in English sporting books of two centuries back.

"Here, some hundred miles south and west of Fort McKavett, are the largest turkey-roosts in the world. This beautiful fertile valley, through which the deep, silent stream of the Llano flows, is densely wooded with grand old pecan-trees

along its banks; as are those of its minor tributaries which come boiling down from off the immense upland water-shed of the staked plains, cutting the sides of the 'divide' into narrow canyons. The journey to this sportsman's paradise was over the long-rolling plains of Western Texas. Hour after hour through the day's travel we would drop into the trough of some great plains-wave only to toil on up to the crest of the next, and be met by an endless vista of boundless, billowy-looking prairie. We were following the old Fort Terret trail, its ruts cut so deep in the prairie soil by the heavy supply wagons that these ten years have not healed the scars in the earth's face. At last, after journeying for leagues through the stunted live oaks, we saw from the top of one of the larger divides a dark bluish line against the horizon,—the color of distant leafless trees,—and knew that it meant we should soon open out the valley. Another hour brought us over the last divide, and then our hunting-grounds lay before and below us. All along through the unbroken natural fields the blacktail and prong-horn abound, and feast to their heart's content all the winter through on the white, luscious, and nutritious mesquite grass. Through the valley with its flashing silver stream ran the dark line of the famous pecan-tree forests—the nightly resting-place of that king of game birds, the wild turkey. It would

sound like romancing to tell of the endless number and variety of the waterfowl upon the river; while the multitude of game fish inhabiting the waters make the days spent on the river with the rod rival in excitement and good sport the nights passed gun in hand among the trees in the roosts. Of course, as we are purely out on a turkey shoot, during the day no louder sport is permitted than whipping the stream, or taking the greyhounds well back on the plains away from the river to course antelope, jack-rabbit, or maybe even some fine old gobbler himself.

"When, after our journey, we reached the brink of the canyon; to drop down into the valley, pass over the lowlands, and settle ourselves comfortably in camp under the shadow of the old stockade fort by the river, was a matter of but a few hours. There we waited for the afternoon shadows to lengthen and the evening to come, when off we went up the stream for five or six miles to a spot where some mighty forest monarchs with huge, bare, spreading limbs had caught the eye of one of our sporting scouts in the afternoon. Leaving our horses half a mile from the place, we walked silently along the river bank through the jungle to the roosting-trees, where we scattered, and each man secreted himself as best he could in the underbrush, or in a hollow stump, or in the reeds of the river itself. The sun was setting, and over the hills

and from the lowlands came the echoes of the familiar gobble, gobble, gobble, as each strutting, foolishly proud cock headed his admiring family for the roost, after their day's feeding on the uplands. Soon, as I lay close and hushed in my hiding-place, sounds like the clinking of silver, followed by what seemed like a breath of the wind rushing through the trees, struck my ears. I hardly dared breathe, for the sounds were made by the snapping of a gobbler's quills and his rustling feathers; and immediately a magnificent old bird, swelling and clucking, bullying his wives and abusing his weaker children to the last, trod majestically down to the water's edge, and, after taking his evening drink, winged his way to his favorite bough above, where he was joined, one by one, by his family and relations and friends, who came by tens and dozens from the surrounding country. Soon in the rapidly darkening twilight the superb old pecan-trees looked as if they were bending under a heavy crop of the most odd-shaped and lively kind of fruit. The air was filled with the peevish pi-ou! pi-ou! of the sleepy birds. Gradually, the noisy fluttering subsided, and the last faint unsettled peep, even, was hushed. Dead silence reigned, and we waited and watched. The moon climbed up, and in another hour, as we looked through the tree-tops, we could make out against the light background of the sky, almost as

clearly as by day, the sleeping victims of our guns and rifles. A low soft whistle was passed along from man to man; and the signal given, how different the scene became! A deafening report suddenly rang out into the silent night, a flash of light belched from the gun-muzzle, and a heavy thud followed as twenty pounds of turkey struck the ground. In our silent moccasins we flitted about under the roost, and report after report on all sides told how good the sport was and how excellent the chance that the boys at McKavett would have plenty of turkeys at their Christmas dinner. The turkeys were so surprised by the sudden noise, so entirely unprepared for the visit of the sportsman to their secluded retreat, that they did not know what to make of it, often remaining stupidly on their branch after a companion five feet off had been shot down. With the last bird shot or flown away ended our evening's sport. All the dead birds were gathered together and strapped in bunches by our saddles and on the pack-mules. It does not take many pecan- and grass-fed turkeys to make a load, and back we trotted to camp, the steel hoofs striking into the prairie soil with a merry ring of triumph over the night's work. The hour was nearly midnight when we sat down to the delicately browned turkey-steaks in the mess tent, and realized that we had enjoyed the delights of one of the

best sports in Texas—turkey-shooting in the roosts.

"Early in the afternoon following the night's sport we left the fort mounted on fine three-quarter Kentucky thoroughbreds, and, taking the eleven greyhounds, struck off six or eight miles into the plains. Then spreading into line we alternated dogs and horses, and keeping a general direction, beat up the small oak clumps, grass clusters, or mesquite jungles as we went along. Soon, with a loud whirr of wings, three or four turkeys rose out of the grass ahead, started up by one of the greyhounds; the rest of the party closed in from all sides; dogs and men choosing each the bird they marked as theirs. The turkey, after towering a bit, with wings set struck off at a pace like a bullet, and with eyes fixed upwards the hounds coursed after him. It was whip and spur for a mile as hard as horse, man, and hound could make the pace. The turkey at last came down nearer and nearer the ground, its small wings refusing to bear the weight of the heavy body. Finally, down he came and began running; then the hounds closed in on him and forced him up again, as is always the case. The second flight was not a strong one, and soon he was skimming ten or even a less number of feet from the ground. Now came the sport of it all; the hounds were bunched and running like a pack behind him.

Suddenly old 'Grimbeard,' in the heart of the pack, thought it was time for the supreme effort; with a rush he went to the front, and, as a mighty spring carried him up in the air, he snapped his clean, cruel fangs under the brave old gobbler, who by a great effort rose just out of reach. One after another, in the next twenty-five yards, each hound made his trial and failed. At last the old hound again made his rush, sprang up a wonderful height into the air, and cut the bird down as with a knife.

"The first flight of a turkey when being coursed is rarely more than a mile, and the second about half as long. After that, if it gets up at all again, it is for very short flights, so near the ground that it is soon cut down by any hound. The astonishing springs a greyhound who is an old hand at turkey coursing will make, are a constant source of surprise and wonder to those fond of the sport. A turkey, after coming down from his first flight, will really perform the feat which fable attributes to the ostrich: that is, will run its head into a clump of bushes and stand motionless as if, since it cannot see its foes, it were itself equally invisible. During the day turkeys are scattered all over the plains, and it is no unusual thing to get in one afternoon's ride eight or ten of them."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DEER OF THE RIVER BOTTOMS

OF all the large game of the United States, the white-tail deer is the best known and the most widely distributed. Taking the Union as a whole, fully ten men will be found who have killed white-tail for one who has killed any other kind of large game. And it is the only ruminant animal which is able to live on in the land even when it has been pretty thickly settled. There is hardly a State wherein it does not still exist, at least in some out-of-the-way corner; and long after the elk and the buffalo have passed away, and when the big-horn and prong-horn have become rare indeed, the white-tail deer will still be common in certain parts of the country.

When, less than five years ago, cattle were first driven on to the northern plains, the white-tail were the least plentiful and the least sought after of all the large game; but they have held their own as none of the others have begun to do, and are already in certain localities more common than any other kind, and indeed in many places are more common than all other kinds put together.

The ranchmen along the Powder River, for instance, now have to content themselves with white-tail venison unless they make long trips back among the hills. The same is rapidly getting to be true of the Little Missouri. This is partly because the skin- and meat-hunters find the chase of this deer to be the most tedious and least remunerative species of hunting, and therefore only turn their attention to it when there is nothing else left to hunt, and partly because the sheep and cattle and the herdsmen who follow them are less likely to trespass on their grounds than on the grounds of other game. The white-tail is the deer of the river bottoms and of the large creeks, whose beds contain plenty of brush and timber running down into them. It prefers the densest cover, in which it lies hid all day, and it is especially fond of wet, swampy places, where a horse runs the risk of being engulfed. Thus it is very rarely jumped by accident, and when the cattle stray into its haunts, which is but seldom, the cowboys are not apt to follow them. Besides, unlike most other game, it has no aversion to the presence of cattle, and in the morning and evening will come out and feed freely among them.

This last habit was the cause of our getting a fine buck a few days before last Christmas. The weather was bitterly cold, the spirit in the thermometer sometimes going down at night to 50°

below zero and never for over a fortnight getting above — 10° (Fahrenheit). Snow covered the ground, to the depth, however, of but a few inches, for in the cattle country the snowfall is always light. When the cold is so great it is far from pleasant to be out-of-doors. Still, a certain amount of riding about among the cattle and ponies had to be done, and almost every day was spent by at least one of us in the saddle. We wore the heaviest kind of all-wool underclothing, with flannels, lined boots, and great fur coats, caps, and gauntlets or mittens, but yet after each ride one or the other of us would be almost sure to come in with a touch of the frost somewhere about him. On one ride I froze my nose and one cheek, and each of the men froze his ears, fingers, or toes at least once during the fortnight. This generally happened while riding over a plain or plateau with a strong wind blowing in our faces. When the wind was on our backs it was not bad fun to gallop along through the white weather, but when we had to face it, it cut through us like a keen knife. The ponies did not seem to mind the cold much, but the cattle were very uncomfortable, standing humped up in the bushes except for an hour or two at mid-day, when they ventured out to feed; some of the young stock, which were wintering on the range for the first time, died from the exposure. A very weak animal we would bring into

the cow-shed and feed with hay; but this was only done in cases of the direst necessity, as such an animal has then to be fed for the rest of the winter, and the quantity of hay is limited. In the Bad Lands proper, cattle do not wander far, the deep ravines affording them a refuge from the bitter icy blasts of the winter gales; but if by any accident caught out on the open prairie in a blizzard, a herd will drift before it for maybe more than a hundred miles, until it finds a shelter capable of holding it. For this reason it is best to keep more or less of a lookout over all the bunches of beasts, riding about among them every few days and turning back any herd that begins to straggle toward the open plains; though in winter, when weak and emaciated, the cattle must be disturbed and driven as little as possible, or the loss among them will be fearful.

One afternoon, while most of us were away from the ranch-house, one of the cowboys, riding in from his day's outing over the range, brought word that he had seen two white-tail deer, a buck and a doe, feeding with some cattle on the side of a hill across the river, and not much more than half a mile from the house. There was about an hour of daylight left, and one of the foremen, a tall, fine-looking fellow named Ferris, the best rider on the ranch, but not an unusually good shot, started out at once after the deer; for in the late fall and

early winter we generally kill a good deal of game, as it then keeps well and serves as a food supply throughout the cold months; after January, we hunt as little as possible. Ferris found the deer easily enough, but they started before he could get a standing shot at them, and when he fired as they ran, he only broke one of the buck's hind legs, just above the ankle. He followed it in the snow for several miles, across the river, and down near the house to the end of the bottom, and then back toward the house. The buck was a cunning old beast, keeping in the densest cover, and often doubling back on its trail and sneaking off to one side as his pursuer passed by. Finally, it grew too dark to see the tracks any longer, and Ferris came home.

Next morning, early, we went out to where he had left the trail, feeling very sure from his description of the place (which was less than a mile from the house) that we would get the buck; for when he had abandoned the pursuit the deer was in a copse of bushes and young trees some hundreds of yards across, and in this it had doubtless spent the night, for it was extremely unlikely that, wounded and tired as it was, it would go any distance after finding that it was no longer pursued.

When we got to the thicket we first made a circuit round it to see if the wounded animal had broken cover, but though there were fresh deer

tracks leading both in and out of it, none of them were made by a cripple; so we knew he was still within. It would seem to be a very easy task to track up and kill a broken-legged buck in light snow; but we had to go very cautiously, for though with only three legs he could still run a good deal faster than either of us on two, and we were anxious not to alarm him and give him a good start. Then there were several well-beaten cattle trails through the thicket, and, in addition to that, one or two other deer had been walking to and fro within it; so that it was hard work to follow the tracks. After working some little time we hit on the right trail, finding where the buck had turned into the thickest growth. While Ferris followed carefully in on the tracks, I stationed myself farther on toward the outside, knowing that the buck would in all likelihood start up wind. In a minute or two Ferris came on the bed where he had passed the night, and which he had evidently just left; a shout informed me that the game was on foot, and immediately afterward the crackling and snapping of the branches were heard as the deer rushed through them. I ran as rapidly and quietly as possible toward the place where the sounds seemed to indicate that he would break cover, stopping under a small tree. A minute afterward he appeared, some thirty yards off on the edge of the thicket, and halted for a second to

look round before going into the open. Only his head and antlers were visible above the bushes which hid from view the rest of his body. He turned his head sharply toward me as I raised the rifle, and the bullet went fairly into his throat, just under the jaw, breaking his neck, and bringing him down in his tracks with hardly a kick. He was a fine buck of eight points, unusually fat, considering that the rutting season was just over. We dressed it at once, and, as the house was so near, determined we would drag it there over the snow ourselves, without going back for a horse. Each took an antler, and the body slipped along very easily; but so intense was the cold that we had to keep shifting sides all the time, the hand which grasped the horn becoming numb almost immediately.

White-tail are very canny, and know perfectly well what threatens danger and what does not. Their larger, and to my mind nobler, relation, the black-tail, is, if anything, easier to approach and kill, and yet is by no means so apt to stay in the immediate neighborhood of a ranch, where there is always more or less noise and confusion. The bottom on which my ranch-house stands is a couple of miles in length, and well wooded; all through last summer it was the home of a number of white-tails, and most of them are on it to this moment. Two fawns in especial were really

amusingly tame, at one time spending their days hid in an almost impenetrable tangle of bullberry bushes, whose hither edge was barely a hundred yards from the ranch-house; and in the evening they could frequently be seen from the door as they came out to feed. In walking out after sunset, or in riding home when night had fallen, we would often run across them when it was too dark to make out anything but their flaunting white tails as they cantered out of the way. Yet for all their seeming familiarity they took good care not to expose themselves to danger. We were reluctant to molest them, but one day, having performed our usual weekly or fortnightly feat of eating up about everything there was in the house, it was determined that the two deer (for it was late in autumn and they were then well grown) should be sacrificed. Accordingly one of us sallied out, but found that the sacrifice was not to be consummated so easily, for the should-be victims appeared to distinguish perfectly well between a mere passer-by, whom they regarded with absolute indifference, and any one who harbored sinister designs. They kept such a sharp look-out, and made off so rapidly if any one tried to approach them, that on two evenings the appointed hunter returned empty-handed, and by the third someone else had brought in a couple of black-tail. After that, no necessity arose for molesting the

two "tame deer," for whose sound common-sense we had all acquired a greatly increased respect.

When not much molested white-tail feed in the evening or late afternoon; but if often shot at and chased they only come out at night. They are very partial to the water, and in the warm summer nights will come down into the prairie ponds and stand knee-deep in them, eating the succulent marsh plants. Most of the plains rivers flow through sandy or muddy beds with no vegetable growth, and to these, of course, the deer merely come down to drink or refresh themselves by bathing, as they contain nothing to eat.

Throughout the day the white-tails keep in the densest thickets, choosing if possible those of considerable extent. For this reason they are confined to the bottoms of the rivers and the mouths of the largest creeks, the cover elsewhere being too scanty to suit them. It is very difficult to make them leave one of their haunts during the daytime. They lie very close, permitting a man to pass right by them; and the twigs and branches surrounding them are so thick and interlaced that they can hear the approach of any one from a long distance off, and hence are rarely surprised. If they think there is danger that the intruder will discover them, they arise and skulk silently off through the thickest part of the brush. If followed, they keep well ahead, moving perfectly

noiselessly through the thicket, often going round in a circle and not breaking cover until hard pressed; yet all the time stepping with such sharp-eyed caution that the pursuing hunter will never get a glimpse of the quarry, though the patch of brush may not be fifty rods across.

At times the white-tail will lie so close that it may almost be trodden on. One June morning I was riding down along the river, and came to a long bottom, crowded with rose-bushes, all in bloom. It was crossed in every direction by cattle paths, and a drove of long-horned Texans were scattered over it. A cow-pony gets accustomed to travelling at speed along the cattle trails, and the one I bestrode threaded its way among the twisted narrow paths with perfect ease, loping rapidly onward through a sea of low rose-bushes, covered with the sweet, pink flowers. They gave a bright color to the whole plain, while the air was filled with the rich, full songs of the yellow-breasted meadow larks, as they perched on the topmost sprays of the little trees. Suddenly, a white-tail doe sprang up almost from under the horse's feet, and scudded off with her white flag flaunting. There was no reason for harming her and she made a pretty picture as she bounded lightly off among the rose-red flowers, passing without heed through the ranks of the long-horned and savage-looking steers.

Doubtless she had a little spotted fawn not far away. These wee fellows soon after birth grow very cunning and able to take care of themselves, keeping in the densest part of the brush, through which they run and dodge like a rabbit. If taken young, they grow very tame and are most dainty pets. One which we had round the house answered well to its name. It was at first fed with milk, which it lapped eagerly from a saucer, sharing the meal with the two cats, who rather resented its presence and cuffed it heartily when they thought it was greedy and was taking more than its share. As it grew older it would eat bread or potatoes from our hands, and was perfectly fearless. At night it was let go or put in the cow-shed, whichever was handiest, but it was generally round in time for breakfast next morning. A blue ribbon with a bell attached was hung round its neck, so as to prevent its being shot; but in the end it shared the fate of all pets, for one night it went off and never came back again. Perhaps it strayed away of its own accord, but more probably some raw hand at hunting saw it, and slaughtered it without noticing the bell hanging from its neck.

The best way to kill white-tail is to still-hunt carefully through their haunts at dusk, when the deer leave the deep recesses in which their daybeds lie, and come out to feed in the more open

parts. For this kind of hunting, no dress is so good as a buckskin suit and moccasins. The moccasins enable one to tread softly and noiselessly, while the buckskin suit is of a most inconspicuous color, and makes less rustling than any other material when passing among projecting twigs. Care must be taken to always hunt up wind, and to advance without any sudden motions, walking close in to the edge of the thickets, and keeping a sharp lookout, as it is of the first importance to see the game before the game sees you. The feeding-grounds of the deer may vary. If they are on a bottom studded with dense copses, they move out on the open between them; if they are in a dense wood, they feed along its edges; but, by preference, they keep in the little glades and among the bushes underneath the trees. Wherever they may be found, they are rarely far from thick cover, and are always on the alert, lifting up their heads every few bites they take to see if any danger threatens them. But, unlike the antelope, they seem to rely for safety even more upon escaping observation than upon discovering danger while it is still far off, and so are usually in sheltered places where they cannot be seen at any distance. Hence, shots at them are generally obtained, if obtained at all, at very much closer range than at any other kind of game; the average distance would be nearer fifty than a hundred yards. On the

other hand, more of the shots obtained are running ones than is the case with the same number taken at antelope or black-tail.

If the deer is standing just out of a fair-sized wood, it can often be obtained by creeping up along the edge; if seen among the large trees, it is even more easily still-hunted, as a tree-trunk can be readily kept in line with the quarry, and thus prevent its suspecting any approach. But only a few white-tail are killed by regular and careful stalking; in much the greater number of instances the hunter simply beats, patiently and noiselessly from leeward, carefully through the clumps of trees and bushes, always prepared to see his game, and with his rifle at the ready. Sooner or later, as he steals round a corner, he either sees the motionless form of a deer, not a great distance off, regarding him intently for a moment before taking flight; or else he hears a sudden crash, and catches a glimpse of the animal as it lopes into the bushes. In either case, he must shoot quick; but the shot is a close one.

If he is heard or seen a long way off, the deer is very apt, instead of running away at full speed, to skulk off quietly through the bushes. But when suddenly startled, the white-tail makes off at a great rate, at a rolling gallop, the long, broad tail, pure white, held up in the air. In the dark or in thick woods, often all that can be seen is the flash

of white from the tail. The head is carried low and well forward in running; a buck, when passing swiftly through thick underbrush, usually throws his horns back almost on his shoulders, with his nose held straight in front. White-tail venison is, in season, most delicious eating, only inferior to the mutton of the mountain sheep.

Among the places which are most certain to contain white-tails may be mentioned the tracts of swampy ground covered with willows and the like, which are to be found in a few (and but a few) localities through the plains country; there are, for example, several such along the Powder River, just below where the Little Powder empties into it. Here there is a dense growth of slim-stemmed young trees, sometimes almost impenetrable, and in other places opening out into what seem like arched passage-ways, through which a man must at times go almost on all fours. The ground may be covered with rank shrubbery, or it may be bare mud with patches of tall reeds. Here and there, scattered through these swamps, are pools of water, and sluggish ditches occasionally cut their way deep below the surface of the muddy soil. Game trails are abundant all through them, and now and then there is a large path beaten out by the cattle; while at intervals there are glades and openings. A horse must be very careful in going through such a swamp or he will certainly get

mired, and even a man must be cautious about his footing. In the morning or late afternoon a man stands a good chance of killing deer in such a place, if he hunts carefully through it. It is comparatively easy to make but little noise in the mud and among the wet, yielding swamp plants; and by moving cautiously along the trails and through the openings, one can see some little distance ahead; and toward evening the pools should be visited, and the borders as far back as possible carefully examined for any deer that come to drink, and the glades should be searched through for any that may be feeding. In the soft mud, too, a fresh track can be followed as readily as if in snow, and without exposing the hunter to such probability of detection. If a shot is obtained at all, it is at such close quarters as to more than counterbalance the dimness of the light, and to render the chance of a miss very unlikely. Such hunting is, for a change, very pleasant, the perfect stillness of the place, the quiet with which one has to move, and the constant expectation of seeing game keeping one's nerves always on the stretch; but after a while it grows tedious, and it makes a man feel cramped to be always ducking and crawling through such places. It is not to be compared, in cool weather, with still-hunting on the open hills; nevertheless, in the furious heat of the summer sun it has its advantages, for it is

not often so oppressingly hot in the swamp as it is on the open prairie in the dry thickets.

The white-tail is the only kind of large game for which the shot-gun can occasionally be used. At times, in the dense brush it is seen, if seen at all, at such short distances, and the shots have to be taken so hurriedly, that the shot-gun is really the best weapon wherewith to attempt its death. One method of taking it is to have trained dogs hunt through a valley and drive the deer to guns stationed at the opposite end. With a single slow hound, given to baying, a hunter can often follow the deer on foot in the method adapted in most of the Eastern States for the capture of both the gray and the red fox. If the dog is slow and noisy, the deer will play round in circles and can be cut off and shot from a stand.

Any dog will soon put a deer out of a thicket, or drive it down a valley; but without a dog it is often difficult to drive deer toward the runaway or place at which the guns are stationed, for the white-tail will often skulk round and round a thicket instead of putting out of it when a man enters; and even when started it may break back past the driver instead of going toward the guns.

In all these habits white-tail are the very reverse of such game as antelope. Antelope care nothing at all about being seen, and indeed rather court observation, while the chief anxiety

of a white-tail is to go unobserved. In passing through a country where there are antelope, it is almost impossible not to see them; while, where there are an equal number of white-tail, the odds are manifold against travellers catching a glimpse of a single individual. The prong-horn is perfectly indifferent as to whether the pursuer sees him, so long as in his turn he is able to see the pursuer; and he relies entirely upon his speed and wariness for his safety; he never trusts for a moment to eluding observation. White-tail, on the contrary, rely almost exclusively either upon lying perfectly still and letting the danger pass by, or else, upon skulking off so slyly as to be unobserved; it is only when hard pressed or suddenly startled that they bound boldly and freely away.

In many of the dense jungles without any opening the brush is higher than a man's head, and one has then practically no chance at all of getting a shot on foot when crossing through such places. But I have known instances where a man had himself driven in a tall light wagon through a place like this, and got several snap-shots at the deer, as he caught momentary glimpses of them stealing off through the underbrush; and another method of pursuit in these jungles is occasionally followed by one of my foremen, who, mounted on a quiet horse, which will stand fire, pushes

through the bushes and now and then gets a quick shot at a deer from horseback. I have tried this method myself, but without success, for, though my hunting-horse, old Manitou, stands as steady as a rock, yet I find it impossible to shoot the rifle with any degree of accuracy from the saddle.

Except on such occasions as those just mentioned, the white-tail is rarely killed while hunting on horseback. This last term, by-the-way, must not be understood in the sense in which it would be taken by the fox-hunter of the South, or by the Californian and Texan horsemen who course hare, antelope, and wild turkey with their fleet greyhounds. With us, hunting on horseback simply means that the horse is ridden not only to the hunting-grounds, but also through them, until the game is discovered; then the hunter immediately dismounts, shooting at once if the animal is near enough and has seen him, or stalking up to it on foot if it is a good distance off and he is still unobserved. Where great stretches of country have to be covered, as in antelope shooting, hunting on horseback is almost the only way followed; but the haunts and habits of the white-tail deer render it nearly useless to try to kill them in this way, as the horse would be sure to alarm them by making a noise, and even if he did not there would hardly be time to dismount and take

a snap-shot. Only once have I ever killed a white-tail buck while hunting on horseback; and at that time I had been expecting to fall in with black-tail.

This was while we had been making a wagon trip to the westward, following the old Keogh trail, which was made by the heavy army wagons that journeyed to Fort Keogh in the old days when the soldiers were, except a few daring trappers, the only white men to be seen on the last great hunting-ground of the Indians. It was abandoned as a military route several years ago, and is now only rarely travelled over, either by the canvas-topped ranch-wagon of some wandering cattlemen, — like ourselves, — or else by a small party of emigrants, in two or three prairie schooners, which contain all their household goods. Nevertheless, it is still as plain and distinct as ever. The two deep parallel ruts, cut into the sod by the wheels of the heavy wagon, stretch for scores of miles in a straight line across the level prairie, and take great turns and doublings to avoid the impassable portions of the Bad Lands. The track is always perfectly plain, for in the dry climate of the Western plains, the action of the weather tends to preserve rather than to obliterate it; where it leads down-hill, the snow water has cut and widened the ruts into deep gullies, so that a wagon has at those places to

travel alongside the road. From any little rising in the prairie the road can be seen, a long way off, as a dark line, which, when near, resolves itself into two sharply defined parallel cuts. Such a road is a great convenience as a landmark. When travelling along it, or one like it, the hunters can separate in all directions, and no matter how long or how far they hunt, there is never the least difficulty about finding camp. For the general direction in which the road lies, is, of course, kept in mind, and it can be reached whether the sun is down or not; then a glance tells if the wagon has passed, and all that remains to be done is to gallop along the trail until camp is found.

On the trip in question we had at first very bad weather. Leaving the ranch in the morning, two of us, who were mounted, pushed on ahead to hunt, the wagon following slowly, with a couple of spare saddle-ponies leading behind it. Early in the afternoon, while riding over the crest of a great divide, which separates the drainage basins of two important creeks, we saw that a tremendous storm was brewing with that marvellous rapidity which is so marked a characteristic of weather changes on the plains. A towering mass of clouds gathered in the northwest, turning that whole quarter of the sky to an inky blackness. From there the storm rolled down toward us at a furious speed, obscuring by degrees the light of

the sun, and extending its wings toward each side, as if to overlap any that tried to avoid its path. Against the dark background of the mass could be seen pillars and clouds of gray mist, whirled hither and thither by the wind, and sheets of level rain driven before it. The edges of the wings tossed to and fro, and the wind shrieked and moaned as it swept over the prairie. It was a storm of unusual intensity; the prairie-fowl rose in flocks before it, scudding with spread wings toward the thickest cover, and the herds of antelope ran across the plain like race-horses to gather in the hollows and behind the low ridges.

We spurred hard to get out of the open, riding with loose reins for the creek. The centre of the storm swept by behind us, fairly across our track, and we only got a wipe from the tail of it. Yet this itself we could not have faced in the open. The first gust caught us a few hundred yards from the creek, almost taking us from the saddle, and driving the rain and hail in stinging level sheets against us. We galloped to the edge of a deep wash-out, scrambled into it at the risk of our necks, and huddled up with our horses underneath the windward bank. Here we remained pretty well sheltered until the storm was over. Although it was August, the air became very cold. The wagon was fairly caught, and would have been blown over if the top had been on; the

driver and horses escaped without injury, pressing under the leeward side, the storm coming so level that they did not need a roof to protect them from the hail. Where the centre of the whirlwind struck, it did great damage, sheets of hailstones as large as pigeons' eggs striking the earth with the velocity of bullets; next day the hailstones could have been gathered up by the bushel from the heaps that lay in the bottom of the gullies and ravines. One of my cowboys was out in the storm, during whose continuance he crouched under his horse's belly; coming home he came across some antelope so numb and stiffened that they could barely limp out of the way.

Near my ranch the hail killed quite a number of lambs. These were the miserable remnants of a flock of twelve thousand sheep driven into the Bad Lands a year before, four fifths of whom had died during the first winter, to the delight of all the neighboring cattlemen. Cattlemen hate sheep because they eat the grass so close that cattle cannot live on the same ground. The sheep-herders are a morose, melancholy set of men, generally afoot, and with no companionship except that of the bleating idiots they are hired to guard. No man can associate with sheep and retain his self-respect. Intellectually, a sheep is about on the lowest level of the brute creation; why the early Christians admired it, whether

young or old, is to a good cattleman always a profound mystery.

The wagon came on to the creek, along whose banks we had taken shelter, and we then went into camp. It rained all night, and there was a thick mist, with continual sharp showers, all the next day and night. The wheeling was, in consequence, very heavy, and, after striking the Keogh trail, we were able to go along it but a few miles, before the fagged-out look of the team and the approach of evening warned us that we should have to go into camp while still a dozen miles from any pool or spring. Accordingly, we made what would have been a dry camp had it not been for the incessant down-pour of rain, which we gathered in the canvas wagon-sheet and in our oilskin overcoats in sufficient quantity to make coffee, having with infinite difficulty started a smouldering fire just to leeward of the wagon. The horses, feeding on the soaked grass, did not need water. An antelope, with the bold and heedless curiosity sometimes shown by its tribe, came up within two hundred yards of us as we were building the fire; but though one of us took a shot at him, it missed. Our shaps and oilskins had kept us perfectly dry, and as soon as our frugal supper was over, we coiled up among the bundles and boxes inside the wagon and slept soundly until daybreak.

When the sun rose next day, the third we were out, the sky was clear, and we two horsemen at once prepared to make a hunt. Some three miles off to the south of where we were camped, the plateau on which we were sloped off into a great expanse of broken ground, with chains upon chains of steep hills, separated by deep valleys, winding and branching in every direction, their bottoms filled with trees and brushwood. Toward this place we rode, intending to go into it some little distance, and then to hunt along through it near the edge. As soon as we got down near the brushy ravine we rode along without talking, guiding the horses as far as possible on earthy places, where they would neither stumble nor strike their feet against stones, and not letting our rifle-barrels or spurs clink against anything. Keeping outside of the brush, a little up the side of the hill, one of us would ride along each side of the ravine, examining intently with our eyes every clump of trees or brushwood. For some time we saw nothing, but, finally, as we were riding both together round the jutting spur of a steep hill, my companion suddenly brought his horse to a halt, and, pointing across the shelving bend to a patch of trees well up on the opposite side of a broad ravine, asked me if I did not see a deer in it. I was off the horse in a second, throwing the reins over his head. We were in

the shadow of the cliff-shoulder, and with the wind in our favor; so we were unlikely to be observed by the game. I looked long and eagerly toward the spot indicated, which was about a hundred and twenty-five yards from us, but at first could see nothing. By this time, however, the experienced plainsman who was with me was satisfied that he was right in his supposition, and he told me to try again and look for a patch of red. I saw the patch at once, just glimmering through the bushes, but should certainly never have dreamed it was a deer if left to myself. Watching it attentively I soon saw it move enough to satisfy me where the head lay; kneeling on one knee and (as it was a little beyond point-blank range) holding at the top of the portion visible, I pulled trigger, and the bright-colored patch disappeared from among the bushes. The aim was a good one, for, on riding up to the brink of the ravine, we saw a fine white-tailed buck lying below us, shot through just behind the shoulder; he was still in the red coat, with his antlers in the velvet.

A deer is far from being such an easy animal to see as the novice is apt to suppose. Until the middle of September he is in the red coat; after that time he is in the gray; but it is curious how each one harmonizes in tint with certain of the surroundings. A red doe lying down is, at a little

distance, undistinguishable from the soil on which she is; while a buck in the gray can hardly be made out in dead timber. While feeding quietly or standing still, they rarely show the proud, free port we are accustomed to associate with the idea of a buck, and look rather ordinary, humble-seeming animals, not at all conspicuous or likely to attract the hunter's attention; but once let them be frightened, and as they stand facing the danger, or bound away from it, their graceful movements and lordly bearing leave nothing to be desired. The black-tail is a still nobler-looking animal; while an antelope, on the contrary, though as light and quick on its feet as is possible for any animal not possessing wings to be, yet has an angular, goat-like look, and by no means conveys to the beholder the same idea of grace that a deer does.

In coming home, on this wagon trip, we made a long moonlight ride, passing over between sunset and sunrise what had taken us three days' journey on the outward march. Of our riding horses, two were still in good condition and able to stand a twenty-four hours' jaunt, in spite of hard work and rough usage; the spare ones, as well as the team, were pretty well done up and could get along but slowly. All day long we had been riding beside the wagon over barren sage-brush plains, following the dusty trails made by the beef-herds

that had been driven towards one of the Montana shipping towns.

When we halted for the evening meal we came near learning by practical experience how easy it is to start a prairie fire. We were camped by a dry creek on a broad bottom covered with thick short grass, as dry as so much tinder. We wished to burn a good circle clear for the camp fire; lighting it, we stood round with branches to keep it under. While thus standing a puff of wind struck us; the fire roared like a wild beast as it darted up; and our hair and eyelashes were well singed before we had beaten it out. At one time it seemed as if, though but a very few feet in extent, it would actually get away from us; in which case the whole bottom would have been a blazing furnace within five minutes.

After supper, looking at the worn-out condition of the team, we realized that it would take three more days travelling at the rate we had been going to bring us in, and as the country was monotonous, without much game, we concluded we would leave the wagon with the driver, and taking advantage of the full moon, push through the whole distance before breakfast next morning. Accordingly, we at nine o'clock again saddled the tough little ponies we had ridden all day and loped off out of the circle of firelight. For nine hours we rode steadily, generally at a

quick lope, across the moon-lit prairie. The hoof-beats of our horses rang out in steady rhythm through the silence of the night, otherwise unbroken save now and then by the wailing cry of a coyote. The rolling plains stretched out on all sides of us, shimmering in the clear moonlight; and occasionally a band of spectral-looking antelope swept silently away from before our path. Once we went by a drove of Texan cattle, who stared wildly at the intruders; as we passed they charged down by us, the ground rumbling beneath their tread, while their long horns knocked against each other with a sound like the clattering of a multitude of castanets. We could see clearly enough to keep our general course over the trackless plain, steering by the stars where the prairie was perfectly level and without landmarks; and our ride was timed well, for as we galloped down into the Valley of the Little Missouri the sky above the line of the level bluffs in our front was crimson with the glow of the unrisen sun.

## CHAPTER V

### THE BLACK-TAIL DEER

FAR different from the low-scudding, brush-loving white-tail, is the black-tail deer, the deer of the ravines and the rocky uplands. In general shape and form, both are much alike; but the black-tail is the larger of the two, with heavier antlers, of which the prongs start from one another, as if each of the tines of a two-pronged pitchfork had bifurcated; and in some cases it looks as if the process had been again repeated. The tail—instead of being broad and bushy as a squirrel's, spreading from the base, and pure white to the tip—is round and close-haired, with the end black, though the rest is white. If an ordinary deer is running, its flaunting flag is almost its most conspicuous part; but no one would notice the tail of a black-tail deer.

All deer vary greatly in size; and a small black-tail buck will be surpassed in bulk by many white-tails; but the latter never reaches the weight and height sometimes attained by the former. The same holds true of the antlers borne by the two animals; on the average, those of the black-tail are the heavier, and exceptionally large antlers of

this species are larger than any of the white-tail. Bucks of both kinds very often have, when full-grown, more than the normal number of ten points; sometimes these many-pronged antlers will be merely deformities, while in other instances the points are more symmetrical, and add greatly to the beauty and grandeur of the head. The venison of the black-tail is said to be inferior in quality to that of the white-tail; but I have never been able to detect much difference, though, perhaps, on the whole, the latter is slightly better.

The gaits of the two animals are widely different. The white-tail runs at a rolling gallop, striking the ground with the forward feet first, the head held forward. The black-tail, on the contrary, holds its head higher up, and progresses by a series of prodigious bounds, striking the earth with all four feet at once, the legs held nearly stiff. It seems like an extraordinary method of running; and the violent exertion tires the deer sooner than does the more easy and natural gait of the white-tail; but for a mile or so these rapidly succeeding bounds enable the black-tail to get over the ground at remarkable speed. Over rough ground, along precipitous slopes, and among the boulders of rocky cliffs, it will go with surprising rapidity and surefootedness, only surpassed by the feats of the big-horn in similar localities, and not equalled by those of any other plains game.

One of the noticeable things in Western plains hunting is the different zones or bands of territory inhabited by different kinds of game. Along the alluvial land of the rivers and large creeks is found the white-tail. Back of those alluvial lands generally comes a broad tract of broken, hilly country, scantily clad with brush in some places; this is the abode of the black-tail deer. And where these hills rise highest, and where the ground is most rugged and barren, there the big-horn is found. After this hilly country is passed, in travelling away from the river, we come to the broad, level plains, the domain of the antelope. Of course, the habitats of the different species overlap at the edges; and this overlapping is most extended in the cases of the big-horn and the black-tail.

The Bad Lands are the favorite haunts of the black-tail. Here the hills are steep and rugged, cut up and crossed in every direction by canyon-like ravines and valleys, which branch out and subdivide in the most intricate and perplexing manner. Here and there are small springs, or pools, marked by the greener vegetation growing round them. Along the bottoms and sides of the ravines there are patches of scrubby undergrowth, and in many of the pockets or glens in the sides of the hills the trees grow to some little height. High buttes rise here and there, naked to the top,

or else covered with stunted pines and cedars, which also grow in the deep ravines and on the edges of the sheer canyons. Such lands, where the ground is roughest, and where there is some cover, even though scattered and scanty, are the best places to find the black-tail. Naturally their pursuit needs very different qualities in the hunter from those required in the chase of the white-tail. In the latter case stealth and caution are the prime requisites; while the man who would hunt and kill the deer of the uplands has more especial need of energy, activity, and endurance, of good judgment and of skill with the rifle. Hunting the black-tail is beyond all comparison the nobler sport. Indeed, there is no kind of plains hunting, except only the chase of the big-horn, more fitted to bring out the best and hardiest of the many qualities which go to make up a good hunter.

It is still a moot question whether it is better to hunt on horseback or on foot; but the course of events is rapidly deciding it in favor of the latter method. Undoubtedly, it is easier and pleasanter to hunt on horseback; and it has the advantage of covering a great deal of ground. But it is impossible to advance with such caution, and it is difficult to shoot as quickly, as when on foot; and where the deer are shy and not very plenty, the most enthusiastic must, slowly and reluctantly but surely, come to the conclusion

that a large bag can only be made by the still-hunter who goes on foot. Of course, in the plains country it is not as in mountainous or thickly wooded regions, and the horse should almost always be taken as a means of conveyance to the hunting-grounds and from one point to another; but the places where game is expected should, as a rule, be hunted over on foot. This rule is by no means a general one, however. There are still many localities where the advantage of covering a great deal of ground more than counterbalances the disadvantage of being on horseback. About one third of my hunts are still made on horseback; and in almost all the others I take old Manitou to carry me to and from the grounds and to pack out any game that may be killed. A hunting-horse is of no use whatever unless he will permit a man to jump from his back and fire with the greatest rapidity; and nowhere does practice have more to do with success than in the case of jumping off a horse to shoot at game which has just been seen. The various movements take a novice a good deal of time; while an old hand will be off and firing with the most instantaneous quickness. Manitou can be left anywhere at a moment's warning, while his rider leaps off, shoots at a deer from almost under his head, and perhaps chases the wounded animal a mile or over; and on his return the good old fellow will be grazing

away, perfectly happy and contented, and not making a movement to run off or evade being caught.

One method of killing deer on horseback is very exciting. Many of the valleys or ravines extend with continual abrupt turns and windings for several miles, the brush and young trees stretching with constant breaks down the middle of the bottom, and leaving a space on each side along which a surefooted horse can gallop at speed. Two men, on swift, hardy horses, can hunt down such a ravine very successfully at evening, by each taking a side and galloping at a good speed the whole length against the wind. The patter of the unshod hoofs over the turf makes but little noise; and the turns are so numerous and abrupt, and the horses go so swiftly, that the hunters come on the deer almost before the latter are aware of their presence. If it is so late in the day that the deer have begun to move they will find the horses close up before they have a suspicion of danger, while if they are still lying in the cover the suddenness of the appearance of their foe is apt to so startle them as to make them break out and show themselves instead of keeping hid, as they would probably do if they perceived the approach from afar. One thus gets a close running shot or if he waits a minute he will generally get a standing shot at some little distance, owing

to a very characteristic habit of the black-tail. This is its custom of turning round, apparently actuated simply by curiosity, to look at the object which startled it, after it has run off a hundred and fifty yards or so. It then stands motionless for a few seconds, and offers a chance for a steady shot. If the chance is not improved, no other will offer, for as soon as the deer has ended its scrutiny it is off again, and this time will not halt till well out of danger. Owing to its singular gait, a succession of buck jumps, the black-tail is a peculiarly difficult animal to hit while on the run; and it is best to wait until it stops and turns before taking the shot, as, if fired at, the report will generally so alarm it as to make it continue its course without halting to look back. Some of the finest antlers in my possession come from bucks killed by this method of hunting; and it is a most exhilarating form of sport, the horse galloping rapidly over what is often very broken ground, and the senses being continually on the alert for any sign of game. The rush and motion of the horse, and the care necessary to guide it and at the same time be in constant readiness for a shot, prevent the chase having any of the monotony that is at times inseparable from still-hunting proper.

Nevertheless, it is by still-hunting that most deer are killed, and the highest form of hunting craft is shown in the science of the skilful still-

hunter. With sufficient practice, any man who possesses common-sense, and is both hardy and persevering, can become, to a certain extent, a still-hunter. But the really *good* still-hunter is born rather than made; though, of course, in addition to possessing the gifts naturally, he must also have developed them, by constant practice, to the highest point possible. One of the foremen on my ranch is a really remarkably good hunter and game shot, and another does almost as well; but the rest of us are not, and never will be, anything very much out of the common. By dint of practice, we have learned to shoot as well at game as at a target; and those of us who are fond of the sport, hunt continually, and so get a good deal of game at one time or another. Hunting through good localities, up wind, quietly and perseveringly, we come upon quite a number of animals; and we can kill a standing shot at a fair distance and a running shot close up, and by good luck every now and then kill far off; but to much more than is implied in the description of such modest feats we cannot pretend.

After the disappearance of the buffalo and the thinning out of the elk, the black-tail was, and in most places it still is, the game most sought after by the hunters; I have myself shot as many of them as of all other kinds of plains game put together. But for this very reason it is fast disap-

pearing; and bids fair to be the next animal, after the buffalo and elk, to vanish from the places that formerly knew it. The big-horn and the prong-horn are more difficult to stalk and kill, partly from their greater natural wariness, and partly from the kind of ground on which they are found. But it seems at first sight strange that the black-tail should be exterminated or driven away so much more quickly than the white-tail, when it has sharper ears and nose, is more tenacious of life, and is more wary. The main reason is to be found in the difference in the character of the haunts of the two creatures. The black-tail is found on much more open ground, where the animals can be seen farther off, where it is much easier to take advantage of the direction of the wind and to get along without noise, and where far more country can be traversed in a given time; and though the average length of the shots taken is in one case two or three times as great as in the other, yet this is more than counterbalanced by the fact that they are more often standing ones, and that there is usually much more time for aiming. Moreover, one kind of sport can be followed on horseback, while the other must be followed on foot; and then the chase of the white-tail, in addition, is by far the more tedious and patience-trying. And the black-tail are much the more easily scared or driven out of a locality by

persecution or by the encroaching settlements. All these qualities combine to make it less able to hold its own against mankind than its smaller rival. It is the favorite game of the skin hunters and meat hunters, and has, in consequence, already disappeared from many places, while in others its extermination is going on at a frightfully rapid rate, owing to its being followed in season and out of season without mercy. Besides, the cattle are very fond of just the places to which it most often resorts; and wherever cattle go the cowboys ride about after them, with their ready six-shooters at their hips. They blaze away at any deer they see, of course, and in addition to now and then killing or wounding one, continually harry and disturb the poor animals. In the more remote and inaccessible districts the black-tail will long hold its own, to be one of the animals whose successful pursuit will redound most to the glory of the still-hunter; but in a very few years it will have ceased entirely to be one of the common game animals of the plains.

Its great curiosity is one of the disadvantages under which it labors in the fierce struggle for existence, compared to the white-tail. The latter, when startled, does not often stop to look round; but, as already said, the former will generally do so after having gone a few hundred feet. The first black-tail I ever killed—unfortunately killed,

for the body was not found until spoiled—was obtained owing solely to this peculiarity. I had been riding up along the side of a brushy coulie, when a fine buck started out some thirty yards ahead. Although so close, my first shot, a running one, was a miss; when a couple of hundred yards off, on the very crest of the spur up which he had run, he stopped and turned partially round. Firing again from a rest, the bullet broke his hind leg far up and went into his body. Off he went on three legs, and I after him as fast as the horse could gallop. He went over the spur and down into the valley of the creek from which the coulie branched up, in very bad ground. My pony was neither fast nor surefooted, but of course in half a mile overhauled the three-legged deer, which turned short off and over the side of the hill flanking the valley. Instead of running right up on it I foolishly dismounted and began firing; after the first shot—a miss—it got behind a boulder hitherto unseen, and thence over the crest. The pony meanwhile had slipped its hind leg into the rein; when, after some time, I got it out and galloped up to the ridge, the most careful scrutiny of which my unpractised eyes were capable failed to discover a track on the dry ground, hard as granite. A day or two afterwards the place where the carcass lay was made known by the vultures, gathered together from all parts to feed upon it.

When fired at from a place of hiding, deer which have not been accustomed to the report of a gun will often appear confused and uncertain what to do. On one occasion, while hunting in the mountains, I saw an old buck with remarkably large horns, of curious and beautiful shape, more symmetrical than in most instances where the normal form is departed from. The deer was feeding in a wide, gently sloping valley, containing no cover from behind which to approach him. We were in no need of meat, but the antlers were so fine that I felt they justified the death of their bearer. After a little patient waiting, the buck walked out of the valley, and over the ridge on the other side, moving up wind; I raced after him, and crept up behind a thick growth of stunted cedars, which had started up from among some boulders. The deer was about a hundred yards off, down in the valley. Out of breath, and over-confident, I fired hastily, overshooting him. The wind blew the smoke back away from the ridge, so that he saw nothing, while the echo prevented his placing the sound. He took a couple of jumps nearer, when he stood still and was again overshot. Again he took a few jumps, and the third shot went below him; and the fourth just behind him. This was too much, and away he went. In despair, I knelt down (I had been firing off-hand), took a steady aim well forward on

his body, and fired, bringing him down, but with small credit to the shot, for the bullet had gone into his hip, paralyzing his hind-quarters. The antlers are the finest pair I ever got, and form a magnificent ornament for the hall; but the shooting is hardly to be recalled with pleasure. Still, though certainly very bad, it was not quite as discreditable as the mere target shot would think. I have seen many a crack marksman at the target do quite as bad missing when out in the field, and that not once, but again and again.

Of course, in those parts of the wilderness where the black-tail are entirely unused to man, they are as easy to approach (from the leeward side) as is any and every other kind of game under like conditions. In lonely spots, to which hunters rarely or never penetrate, deer of this species will stand and look at a hunter without offering to run away till he is within fifty yards of them, if he will advance quietly. In a far-off mountain forest I have more than once shot a young buck at less than that distance as he stood motionless, gazing at me, although but little caution had been used in approaching him.

But a short experience of danger on the part of the black-tail changes all this; and where hunters are often afoot, he becomes as wild and wary as may be. Then the successful still-hunter shows that he is indeed well up in the higher

forms of hunting craft. For the man who can, not once by accident, but again and again, as a regular thing, single handed, find and kill his black-tail, has shown that he is no mere novice in his art; still-hunting the black-tail is a sport that only the skilful can follow with good results, and one which implies in the successful sportsman the presence of most of the still-hunter's rarest attributes. All of the qualities which a still-hunter should possess are of service in the pursuit of any kind of game; but different ones will be called into especial play in hunting different kinds of animals. Thus, to be a successful hunter after anything, a man should be patient, resolute, hardy, and with good judgment; he should have good lungs and stout muscles; he should be able to move with noiseless stealth; and he should be keen-eyed, and a first-rate marksman with the rifle. But in different kinds of shooting, the relative importance of these qualities varies greatly. In hunting white-tail deer, the two prime requisites are stealth and patience. If the quarry is a big-horn, a man needs especially to be sound in wind and limbs, and to be both hardy and resolute. Skill in the use of the long-range rifle counts for more in antelope hunting than in any other form of sport; and it is in this kind of hunting alone that good marksmanship is more important than anything else. With dangerous

game, cool and steady nerves are of the first consequence; all else comes after. Then, again, in the use of the rifle, the *kind* of skill—not merely the *degree* of skill—required to hunt different animals may vary greatly. In shooting white-tail, it is especially necessary to be a good snap-shot at running game; when the distance is close, quickness is an essential. But at antelope there is plenty of time, and what is necessary is ability to judge distance, and capacity to hit a small stationary object at long range.

The different degrees of estimation in which the chase of the various kinds of plains game is held depend less upon the difficulty of capture than upon the nature of the qualities in the hunter which each particular form of hunting calls into play. A man who is hardy, resolute, and a good shot, has come nearer to realizing the ideal of a bold and free hunter than is the case with one who is merely stealthy and patient; and so, though to kill a white-tail is rather more difficult than to kill a black-tail, yet the chase of the latter is certainly the nobler form of sport, for it calls into play, and either develops or implies the presence of, much more manly qualities than does the other. Most hunters would find it nearly as difficult to watch in silence by a salt-lick throughout the night, and then to butcher with a shot-gun a white-tail, as it would be to walk on foot

through rough ground from morning till evening, and to fairly approach and kill a black-tail; yet there is no comparison between the degree of credit to be attached to one feat and that to be attached to the other. Indeed, if difficulty in killing is to be taken as a criterion, a mink or even a weasel would have to stand as high up in the scale as a deer, were the animals equally plenty.

Ranged in the order of the difficulty with which they are approached and slain, plains game stand as follows: big-horn, antelope, white-tail, black-tail, elk, and buffalo. But, as regards the amount of manly sport furnished by the chase of each, the white-tail should stand at the bottom of the list, and the elk and black-tail abreast of the antelope.

Other things being equal, the length of an animal's stay in the land, when the arch foe of all lower forms of animal life has made his appearance therein, depends upon the difficulty with which he is hunted and slain. But other influences have to be taken into account. The big-horn is shy and retiring; very few, compared to the whole number, will be killed; and yet the others vanish completely. Apparently, they will not remain where they are hunted and disturbed. With antelope and white-tail this does not hold; they will cling to a place far more tenaciously, even if often harassed. The former being the more

conspicuous, and living in such open ground, is apt to be more persecuted; while the white-tail, longer than any other animal, keeps its place in the land in spite of the swinish game butchers, who hunt for hides and not for sport or actual food, and who murder the gravid doe and the spotted fawn with as little hesitation as they would kill a buck of ten points. No one who is not himself a sportsman and lover of nature can realize the intense indignation with which a true hunter sees these butchers at their brutal work of slaughtering the game, in season and out, for the sake of the few dollars they are too lazy to earn in any other and more honest way.

All game animals rely upon both eyes, ears, and nose to warn them of the approach of danger; but the amount of reliance placed on each sense varies greatly in different species. Those found out on the plains pay very little attention to what they hear; indeed, in the open they can hardly be approached near enough to make of much account any ordinary amount of noise caused by the stalker, especially as the latter is walking over little but grass and soft earth. The buffalo, whose shaggy frontlet of hair falls over his eyes and prevents his seeing at any great distance, depends mainly upon his exquisite sense of smell. The antelope, on the other hand, depends almost entirely on his great bulging eyes, and very little

on his nose. His sight is many times as good as that of deer, both species of which, as well as elk, rely both upon sight and hearing, but most of all upon their sense of smell, for their safety. The big-horn has almost as keen eyesight as an antelope, while his ears and nose are as sensitive to sound and scent as are those of an elk.

Black-tail, like other members of the deer family, do not pay much attention to an object which is not moving. A hunter who is standing motionless or squatting down is not likely to receive attention, while a big-horn or prong-horn would probably see him and take the alarm at once; and if the black-tail is frightened and running he will run almost over a man standing in plain sight, without paying any heed to him, if the latter does not move. But the very slightest movement at once attracts a deer's attention, and deer are not subject to the panics that at times overtake other kinds of game. The black-tail has much curiosity, which often proves fatal to it; but which with it is after all by no means the ungovernable passion that it is with the antelope. The white-tail and the big-horn are neither overafflicted with morbid curiosity, nor subject to panics or fits of stupidity; and both these animals, as well as the black-tail, seem to care very little for the death of the leader of the band, going their own ways with small regard for the fate of

the chief, while elk will huddle together in a confused group, and remain almost motionless when their leader is struck down. Antelope, and more especially elk, are subject to perfect panics of unreasoning terror, during which they will often put themselves completely in the power of the hunter; while buffalo will frequently show a downright stupidity, almost unequalled.

The black-tail suffers from no such peculiarities. His eyes are good; his nose and ears excellent. He is ever alert and wary; his only failing is his occasional over-curiosity; and his pursuit taxes to the utmost the skill and resources of the still-hunter.

By all means the best coverings for the feet when still-hunting are moccasins, as with them a man can go noiselessly through ground where hob-nailed boots would clatter like the hoofs of a horse; but in hunting in winter over the icy buttes and cliffs it is best to have stout shoes, with nails in the soles, and if the main work is done on horseback it is best to wear high boots, as they keep the trousers down. Indeed, in the Bad Lands boots have other advantages, for rattlesnakes abound, and against these they afford perfect protection—unless a man should happen to stumble on a snake while crawling along on all fours. But moccasins are beyond all comparison the best footgear for hunting. In very cold weather a

fur cap which can be pulled down over the ears is a necessity; but at other times a brimmed felt hat offers better protection against both sun and rain. The clothes should be of some neutral tint —buckskin is on this account excellent—and very strong.

The still-hunter should be well acquainted with, at any rate, certain of the habits of his quarry. There are seasons when the black-tail is found in bands; such is apt to be the case when the rutting time is over. At this period, too, the deer wander far and wide, making what may almost be called a migration; and in rutting time the bucks follow the does at speed for miles at a stretch. But except at these seasons each individual black-tail has a certain limited tract of country to which he confines himself unless disturbed or driven away, not, of course, keeping in the same spot all the time, but working round among a particular set of ravines and coulies, where the feed is good, and where water can be obtained without going too far out of the immediate neighborhood.

Throughout the plains country the black-tail lives in the broken ground, seldom coming down to the alluvial bottoms or out on the open prairies and plateaus. But he is found all through this broken ground. Sometimes it is rolling in character, with rounded hills and gentle valleys, dotted

here and there with groves of trees; or the hills may rise into high chains, covered with an open pine forest, sending off long spurs and divided by deep valleys and basins. Such places are favorite resorts of this deer; but it is as plentiful in the Bad Lands proper. There are tracts of these which are in part or wholly of volcanic origin; then the hills are called scoria buttes. They are high and very steep, but with rounded tops and edges, and are covered, as is the ground round about, with scoriac boulders. Bushes, and sometimes a few cedar, grow among them, and though they would seem to be most unlikely places for deer, yet black-tail are very fond of them, and are very apt to be found among them. Often in the cold fall mornings they will lie out among the boulders, on the steep side of such a scoria butte, sunning themselves, far from any cover except a growth of brushwood in the bottom of the dry creeks or coulies. The grass on top of and between these scoria buttes is often very nutritious, and cattle are also fond of it. The higher buttes are choice haunts of the mountain sheep.

Nineteen twentieths of the Bad Lands, however, owe their origin not to volcanic action but to erosion and to the peculiar weathering forces always at work in the dry climate of the plains. Geologically, the land is for the most part

composed of a set of parallel, perfectly horizontal strata, of clay, marl, or sandstone, which, being of different degrees of hardness, offer some more and some less resistance to the action of the weather. The table-lands, peaks, cliffs, and jagged ridges are caused solely by the rains and torrents cutting away the land into channels, which at first are merely wash-outs, and at last grow into deep canyons, winding valleys, and narrow ravines or basins. The sides of these cuts are at first perpendicular, exposing to view the various bands of soil, perhaps of a dozen different colors; the hardest bands resist the action of the weather best and form narrow ledges stretching along the face of the cliff. Peaks of the most fantastic shape are formed in this manner; and where a ridge is worn away on each side its crest may be as sharp as a knife-blade, but all notched and jagged. The peaks and ridges vary in height from a few feet to several hundred; the sides of the buttes are generally worn down in places so as to be steeply sloping instead of perpendicular. The long wash-outs and the canyons and canyon-like valleys stretch and branch out in every direction; the dryness of the atmosphere, the extremes of intense heat and bitter cold, and the occasional furious rain-storms keep the edges and angles sharp and jagged, and pile up boulders and masses of loose detritus at the foot of the cliffs and great

lonely crags. Sometimes the valleys are quite broad, with steep sides and with numerous pockets, separated by spurs jutting out into the bottom from the lateral ridges. Other ravines or clefts taper down to a ditch, a foot or so wide, from which the banks rise at an angle of sixty degrees to the tops of the enclosing ridges.

The faces of the terraced cliffs and sheer crags are bare of all but the scantiest vegetation, and where the Bad Lands are most rugged and broken the big-horn is the only game found. But in most places the tops of the buttes, the sides of the slopes, and the bottoms of the valleys are more or less thickly covered with the nutritious grass which is the favorite food of the black-tail.

Of course, the Bad Lands grade all the way from those that are almost rolling in character to those that are so fantastically broken in form and so bizarre in color as to seem hardly properly to belong to this earth. If the weathering forces have not been very active, the ground will look, from a little distance, almost like a level plain, but on approaching nearer, it will be seen to be crossed by straight-sided gullies and canyons, miles in length, cutting across the land in every direction and rendering it almost impassable for horsemen or wagon-teams. If the forces at work have been more intense, the walls between the different gullies have been cut down to thin edges,

or broken through, leaving isolated peaks of strange shape, while the hollows have been channelled out deeper and deeper; such places show the extreme and most characteristic Bad Lands formation. When the weathering has gone on farther, the angles are rounded off, grass begins to grow, bushes and patches of small trees sprout up, water is found in places, and the still very rugged country becomes the favorite abode of the black-tail.

During the daytime, these deer lie quietly in their beds, which are sometimes in the brush and among the matted bushes in the bottoms of the small branching coulies, or heads of the crooked ravines. More often they will be found in the thickets of stunted cedars clothing the brinks of the canyons or the precipitous slopes of the great chasms into which the ground is cleft and rent; or else among the groves of gnarled pines on the sides of the buttes, and in the basins and pockets between the spurs. If the country is not much hunted over, a buck or old doe will often take its mid-day rest out in the open, lying down among the long grass or shrubbery on one of the bare benches at the head of a ravine, at the edge of the dense brush with which its bottom and sides are covered. In such a case, a position is always chosen from which a lookout can be kept all around; and the moment any suspicious object is

seen, the deer slips off into the thicket below him. Perhaps the favorite resting-places are the rounded edges of the gorges, just before the sides of the latter break sheer off. Here the deer lies, usually among a few straggling pines or cedars, on the very edge of the straight side-wall of the canyon, with a steep-shelving slope above him, so that he cannot be seen from the summit; and in such places it is next to impossible to get at him. If lying on a cedar-grown spur or ridge-point, the still-hunter has a better chance, for the evergreen needles with which the ground is covered enable a man to walk noiselessly, and, by stooping or going on all fours, he can keep under the branches. But it is at all times hard and unsatisfactory work to find and successfully still-hunt a deer that is enjoying its day rest. Generally, the only result is to find the warm, fresh bed from which the deer has just sneaked off, the blades of grass still slowly rising, after the hasty departure of the weight that has flattened them down; or else, if in dense cover, the hunter suddenly hears a scramble, a couple of crashing bounds through the twigs and dead limbs, and gets a momentary glimpse of a dark outline vanishing into the thicket as the sole reward of his labor. Almost the only way to successfully still-hunt a deer in the middle of the day, is to find its trail and follow it up to the resting-places, and such a feat needs an

expert tracker and a noiseless and most skilful stalker.

The black-tail prefers to live in the neighborhood of water, where he can get it every twenty-four hours; but he is perfectly willing to drink only every other day, if, as is often the case, he happens to be in a very dry locality. Nor does he stay long in the water or near it, like the white-tail, but moves off as soon as he is no longer thirsty. On moonlight nights he feeds a good deal of the time, and before dawn he is always on foot for his breakfast; the hours around day-break are those in which most of his grazing is done. By the time the sun has been up an hour he is on his way homeward, grazing as he goes; and he will often stay for some little time longer, if there has been no disturbance from man or other foes, feeding among the scattered scrub cedars skirting the thicket in which he intends to make his bed for the day. Having once made his bed he crouches very close in it, and is difficult to put up during the heat of the day; but as the afternoon wears on he becomes more restless, and will break from his bed and bound off at much smaller provocation, while if the place is lonely he will wander out into the open hours before sunset. If, however, he is in much danger of being molested, he will keep close to his hiding-place until nearly nightfall, when he ventures

out to feed. Owing to the lateness of his evening appearance in localities where there is much hunting, it is a safer plan to follow him in the early morning, being on the ground and ready to start out by the time the first streak of dawn appears. Often have I lost deer when riding home in the evening, because the dusk had deepened so that it was impossible to distinguish clearly enough to shoot.

One day one of my cowboys and myself were returning from an unsuccessful hunt, about nightfall, and were still several miles from the river, when a couple of yearling black-tails jumped up in the bed of the dry creek down which we were riding. Our horses, though stout and swift, were not well trained; and the instant we were off their backs they trotted off. No sooner were we on the ground and trying to sight the deer, one of which was cantering slowly off among the bushes, than we found we could not catch the bead sights of our rifles, the outlines of the animals seeming vague, and shadowy, and confounding themselves with the banks and dull green sage bushes behind them. Certainly, six or eight shots were fired, we doing our best to aim, but without any effect; and when we gave it up and turned to look for our horses we were annoyed to see the latter trotting off down the valley half a mile away. We went after at a round pace; but darkness closed in

before we had gained at all on them. There was nothing left to do but to walk on down the valley to the bottoms, and then to wade the river; as the latter was quite high, we had to take off our clothes, and it is very uncomfortable to feel one's way across a river at night, in bare feet, with the gun and the bundle of clothes held high overhead. However, when across the river and half a mile from home, we ran into our horses—a piece of good luck, as otherwise we should have had to spend the next day in looking for them.

Almost the only way in which it is possible to aim after dark is to get the object against the horizon, toward the light. One of the finest bucks I ever killed was shot in this way. It was some little time after the sun had set, and I was hurrying home, riding down along a winding creek at a gallop. The middle of the bottom was covered with brush, while the steep, grassy, rounded hills on each side sent off spurs into the valley, the part between every two spurs making a deep pocket. The horse's feet were unshod and he made very little noise, coming down against the wind. While passing a deep pocket I heard from within it a snort and stamping of feet, the well-known sounds made by a startled deer. Pulling up short I jumped off the horse,—it was Manitou,—who instantly began feeding with perfect indifference to what he probably regarded as an

irrational freak of his master; and, aiming as well as I could in the gathering dusk, held the rifle well ahead of a shadowy gray object which was scudding along the base of the hill towards the mouth of the pocket. The ball struck in front of and turned the deer, which then started obliquely up the hill. A second shot missed it; and I then (here comes in the good of having a repeater) knelt down and pointed the rifle against the sky line, at the place where the deer seemed likely to top the bluff. Immediately afterwards the buck appeared, making the last jump with a great effort which landed him square on the edge, as sharply outlined as a silhouette against the fading western light. My rifle bead was just above him; pulling it down I fired, as the buck paused for a second to recover himself from his last great bound, and with a crash the mighty antlered beast came rolling down the hill, the bullet having broken his back behind the shoulders, afterwards going out through his chest.

At times a little caution must be used in approaching a wounded buck, for if it is not disabled it may be a rather formidable antagonist. In my own experience I have never known a wounded buck to do more than make a pass with his horns, or, in plunging when the knife enters his throat, to strike with his forefeet. But one of my men was regularly charged by a great buck, which he

had wounded, and which was brought to bay on the ice by a dog. It seemed to realize that the dog was not the main antagonist, and knocking him over charged straight past him at the man, and as the latter had in his haste not reloaded his rifle, he might have been seriously injured had it not been for the dog, a very strong and plucky one, which caught the buck by the hock and threw him. The buck got up and again came straight at his foe, uttering a kind of grunting bleat, and it was not till after quite a scuffle that the man, by the help of the dog, got him down and thrust the knife in his throat. Twice I have known hounds to be killed by bucks which they had brought to bay in the rutting season. One of these bucks was a savage old fellow with great thick neck and sharp-pointed antlers. He came to bay in a stream, under a bank thickly matted with willows which grew down into the water, guarding his rear and flanks, while there was a small pool in his front across which the hounds had to swim. Backing in among the willows he rushed out at every dog that came near, striking it under water with his forefeet, and then again retreating to his fortress. In this way he kept the whole pack off, and so injured one hound that he had to be killed. Indeed, a full-grown buck with antlers would be a match for a wolf, unless surprised, and could not improbably beat off a cougar if he

received the latter's spring fairly on his prong points.

Bucks fight fiercely among themselves during the rutting season. At that time the black-tail, unlike the white-tail, is found in bands, somewhat like those of the elk, but much smaller, and the bucks of each band keep up an incessant warfare. A weak buck promptly gets out of the way if charged by a large one; but when two of equal strength come together the battle is well fought. Instances occasionally occur, of a pair of these duellists getting their horns firmly interlocked and thus perishing; but these instances are much rarer, owing to the shape of the antlers, than with the white-tail, of which species I have in my own experience come across two or three sets of skulls held together by their interlacing antlers, the bearers of which had doubtless died owing to their inability to break away from each other.

A black-tail buck is one of the most noble-looking of all deer. His branching and symmetrically curved antlers are set on a small head, carried with beautiful pose by the proud, massive neck. The body seems almost too heavy for the slender legs, and yet the latter bear it as if they were rods of springing steel. Every movement is full of alert, fiery life and grace, and he steps as lightly as though he hardly trod the earth. The large, sensitive ears are thrown forward to catch

the slightest sound; and in the buck they are not too conspicuous, though they are the only parts of his frame which to any eye can be said to take away from his beauty. They give the doe a somewhat mulish look; at a distance, the head of a doe peering out from among twigs looks like a great black V. To me, however, even in the case of the doe, they seem to set off and strengthen by contrast the delicate, finely-moulded look of the head. Owing to these ears the species is called in the books the Mule Deer, and every now and then a plainsman will speak of it by this title. But all plainsmen know it generally, and ninety-nine out of a hundred know it only, as the Black-tail Deer; and as this is the title by which it is known among all who hunt it or live near it, it should certainly be called by the same name in the books.

But though so grand and striking an object when startled, or when excited, whether by curiosity or fear, love or hate, a black-tail is nevertheless often very hard to make out when standing motionless among the trees and brushwood, or when lying down among the boulders. A raw hand at hunting has no idea how hard it is to see a deer when at rest. The color of the hair is gray, almost the same tint as that of the leafless branches and tree trunks; for of course the hunting season is at its height only when the leaves have fallen.

A deer standing motionless looks black or gray, according as the sunlight strikes it; but always looks exactly the same color as the trees around it. It generally stands or lies near some tree trunks; and the eye may pass over it once or twice without recognizing its real nature. In the brush it is still more difficult, and there a deer's form is often absolutely indistinguishable from the surroundings, as one peers through the mass of interlacing limbs and twigs. Once an old hunter and myself in walking along the ridge of a scoria butte passed by, without seeing them, three black-tail lying among the scattered boulders of volcanic rock on the hillside, not fifty yards from us. After a little practical experience a would-be hunter learns not to expect deer always, or even generally, to appear as they do when near by or suddenly startled; but on the contrary to keep a sharp lookout on every dull-looking red or yellow patch he sees in a thicket, and to closely examine any grayish-looking object observed on the hillsides, for it is just such small patches or obscure-looking objects which are apt, if incautiously approached, to suddenly take to themselves legs, and go bounding off at a rate which takes them out of danger before the astonished tyro has really waked up to the fact that they are deer. The first lesson to be learned in still-hunting is the knowledge of how to tell what objects

are and what are not deer; and to learn it is by no means as easy a task as those who have never tried it would think.

When he has learned to see a deer, the novice then has to learn to hit it, and this again is not the easy feat it seems. That he can do well with a shot-gun proves very little as to a man's skill with the rifle, for the latter carries but one bullet, and can therefore hit but in one place, while with a shot-gun, if you hold a foot off your mark you will be nearly as apt to hit as if you held plumb centre. Nor does *mere* practice at a mark avail, though excellent in its way; for a deer is never seen at a fixed and ascertained distance, nor is its outline often clearly and sharply defined, as with a target. Even if a man keeps cool—and for the first shot or two he will probably be flurried—he may miss an absurdly easy shot by not taking pains. I remember on one occasion missing two shots in succession where it seemed really impossible for a man to help hitting. I was out hunting on horseback with one of my men, and on loping round the corner of a brushy valley came suddenly in sight of a buck with certainly more than a dozen points on his great spreading antlers. I jumped off my horse instantly, and fired as he stood facing me not over forty yards off; fired, as I supposed perfectly, coolly, though without dropping on my knee as I should have done. The

shot must have gone high, for the buck bounded away unharmed, heedless of a second ball; and immediately his place was taken by another, somewhat smaller, who sprang out of a thicket into almost the identical place where the big buck had stood. Again I fired and missed; again the buck ran off, and was shot at and missed while running—all four shots being taken within fifty yards. I clambered on to the horse without looking at my companion, but too conscious of his smothered disfavor; after riding a few hundred yards, he said with forced politeness and a vague desire to offer some cheap consolation, that he supposed I had done my best; to which I responded with asperity that I 'd be damned if I had; and we finished our journey homeward in silence. A man is likely to overshoot at any distance; but at from twenty-five to seventy-five yards he is certain to do so if he is at all careless.

Moreover, besides not missing, a man must learn to hit his deer in the right place; the first two or three times he shoots he will probably see the whole deer in the rifle sights, instead of just the particular spot he wishes to strike; that is, he will aim in a general way at the deer's whole body—which will probably result in a wound not disabling the animal in the least for the time, although ensuring its finally dying a lingering and painful death. The most instantaneously fatal places are

the brain and any part of the spinal column; but these offer such small marks that it is usually only by accident they are hit. The mark at any part of which one can fire with safety is a patch about eight inches or a foot square, including the shoulder-blades, lungs, and heart. A kidney-shot is very fatal; but a black-tail will go all day with a bullet through his entrails, and in cold weather I have known one to run several miles with a portion of his entrails sticking out of a wound and frozen solid. To break both shoulders by a shot as the deer stands sideways to the hunter, brings the buck down in its tracks; but perhaps the best place at which to aim is the point in the body right behind the shoulder-blade. On receiving a bullet in this spot the deer will plunge forward for a jump or two, and then go some fifty yards in a labored gallop; will then stop, sway unsteadily on its legs for a second, and pitch forward on its side. When the hunter comes up he will find his quarry stone dead. If the deer stands facing the hunter it offers only a narrow mark, but either a throat or chest shot will be fatal.

Good shooting is especially necessary after black tail, because it is so very tenacious of life; much more so than the white-tail, or, in proportion to its bulk, than the elk. For this reason it is of the utmost importance to give an immediately fatal or disabling wound, or the game will almost

certainly be lost. It is wonderful to see how far and how fast a seemingly crippled deer will go. Of course, a properly trained dog would be of the greatest use in tracking and bringing to bay wounded black-tail; but, unless properly trained to come in to heel, a dog is worse than useless; and, anyhow, it will be hard to keep one, as long as the wolf-hunters strew the ground so plentifully with poisoned bait. We have had several hunting dogs on our ranch at different times; generally wire-haired deer-hounds, fox-hounds, or grey-hounds, by no means absolutely pure in blood; but they all, sooner or later, succumbed to the effects of eating poisoned meat. Some of them were quite good hunting dogs, the rough deer-hounds being perhaps the best at following and tackling a wounded buck. They were all very eager for the sport, and when in the morning we started out on a hunt the dogs were apparently more interested than the men; but their judgment did not equal their zeal, and lack of training made them on the whole more bother than advantage.

But much more than good shooting is necessary before a man can be called a good hunter. Indians, for example, get a good deal of game, but they are in most cases very bad shots. Once, while going up the Clear Fork of the Powder, in Northern Wyoming, one of my men, an excellent hunter, and myself rode into a large camp of

Cheyennes; and after a while started a shooting-match with some of them. We had several trials of skill with the rifle, and, a good deal to my astonishment, I found that most of the Indians (quite successful hunters, to judge by the quantity of smoked venison lying round) were very bad shots, indeed. None of them came anywhere near the hunter who was with me; nor, indeed, to myself. An Indian gets his game by his patience, his stealth, and his tireless perseverance; and a white, to be really successful in still-hunting, must learn to copy some of the Indian's traits.

While the game butchers, the skin hunters, and their like, work such brutal slaughter among the plains animals that these will soon be either totally extinct or so thinned out as to cease being prominent features of plains life, yet, on the other hand, the nature of the country debars them from following certain murderous and unsportsmanlike forms of hunting much in vogue in other quarters of our land. There is no deep water into which a deer can be driven by hounds, and then shot at arm's-length from a boat, as is the fashion with some of the city sportsmen who infest the Adirondack forests during the hunting season; nor is the winter snow ever deep enough to form a crust over which a man can go on snow-shoes, and after running down a deer, which plunges as if in a quagmire, knock the poor, worn-out brute on the

head with an axe. Fire-hunting is never tried in the cattle country; it would be far more likely to result in the death of a steer or pony than in the death of a deer, if attempted on foot with a torch, as is done in some of the Southern States, while the streams are not suited to the floating or jacking with a lantern in the bow of the canoe, as practised in the Adirondacks. Floating and fire-hunting, though by no means to be classed among the nobler kinds of sport, yet have a certain fascination of their own, not so much for the sake of the actual hunting, as for the novelty of being out in the wilderness at night; and the noiselessness absolutely necessary to insure success often enables the sportsman to catch curious glimpses of the night life of the different kinds of wild animals.

If it were not for the wolf poison, the plains country would be peculiarly fitted for hunting with hounds; and, if properly carried on, there is no manlier form of sport. It does not imply in the man who follows it the skill that distinguishes the successful still-hunter, but it has a dash and excitement all its own, if the hunter follows the hounds on horseback. But, as carried on in the Adirondacks and in the Eastern and Southern mountains generally, hounding deer is not worthy of much regard. There the hunter is stationed at a runaway over which deer will

probably pass, and has nothing to do but sit still for a number of weary hours and perhaps put a charge of buckshot into a deer running by but a few yards off. If a rifle instead of a shot-gun is used, a certain amount of skill is necessary, for then it is hard to hit a deer running, no matter how close up; but even with this weapon all the sportsman has to do is to shoot well; he need not show knowledge of a single detail of hunting craft, nor need he have any trait of mind or body such as he must possess to follow most other kinds of the chase.

Deer-hunting on horseback is something widely different. Even if the hunters carry rifles and themselves kill the deer, using the dogs merely to drive it out of the brush, they must be bold and skilful horsemen, and must show good judgment in riding to cut off the quarry, so as to be able to get a shot at it. This is the common American method of hunting the deer in those places where it is followed with horse and hound; but it is also coursed with greyhounds in certain spots where the lay of the land permits this form of sport, and in many districts, even where ordinary hounds are used, the riders go unarmed and merely follow the pack till the deer is bayed and pulled down. All kinds of hunting on horseback —and most hunting on horseback is done with hounds—tend to bring out the best and manliest

qualities in the men who follow them, and they should be encouraged in every way. Long after the rifleman, as well as the game he hunts, shall have vanished from the plains, the cattle country will afford fine sport in coursing hares; and both wolves and deer could be followed and killed with packs of properly-trained hounds, and such sport would be even more exciting than still-hunting with the rifle. It is on the great plains lying west of the Missouri that riding to hounds will in the end receive its fullest development as a national pastime.

But at present, for the reasons already stated, it is almost unknown in the cattle country; and the ranchman who loves sport must try still-hunting—and by still-hunting is meant pretty much every kind of chase where a single man, unaided by a dog, and almost always on foot, outgenerals a deer and kills it with the rifle. To do this successfully, unless deer are very plenty and tame, implies a certain knowledge of the country, and a good knowledge of the habits of the game. The hunter must keep a sharp look-out for deer sign; for, though a man soon gets to have a general knowledge of the kind of places in which deer are likely to be, yet he will also find that they are either very capricious, or else that no man has more than a partial understanding of their tastes and likings; for many spots

apparently just suited to them will be almost uninhabited, while in others they will be found where it would hardly occur to any one to suspect their presence. Any cause may temporarily drive deer out of a given locality. Still-hunting, especially, is sure to send many away, while rendering the others extremely wild and shy, and where deer have become used to being pursued in only one way, it is often an excellent plan to try some entirely different method.

A certain knowledge of how to track deer is very useful. To become a really skilful tracker is most difficult; and there are some kinds of ground—where, for instance, it is very hard and dry, or frozen solid—on which almost any man will be at fault. But any one with a little practice can learn to do a certain amount of tracking. On snow, of course, it is very easy; but on the other hand it is also peculiarly difficult to avoid being seen by the deer when the ground is white. After deer have been frightened once or twice, or have even merely been disturbed by man, they get the habit of keeping a watch back on their trail; and when snow has fallen, a man is such a conspicuous object deer see him a long way off, and even the tamest become wild. A deer will often, before lying down, take a half circle back to one side and make its bed a few yards from its trail, where it can, itself unseen,

watch any person tracing it up. A man tracking in snow needs to pay very little heed to the footprints, which can be followed without effort, but requires to keep up the closest scrutiny over the ground ahead of him, and on either side of the trail.

In the early morning when there is a heavy dew the footprints will be as plain as possible in the grass, and can then be followed readily; and in any place where the ground is at all damp they will usually be plain enough to be made out without difficulty. When the ground is hard or dry the work is very much less easy, and soon becomes so difficult as not to be worth while following up. Indeed, at all times, even in the snow, tracks are chiefly of use to show the probable locality in which a deer may be found; and the still-hunter, instead of laboriously walking along a trail will do far better to merely follow it until, from its freshness and direction, he feels confident that the deer is in some particular space of ground, and then hunt through it, guiding himself by his knowledge of the deer's habits and by the character of the land. Tracks are of most use in showing whether deer are plenty or scarce, whether they have been in the place recently or not. Generally, signs of deer are infinitely more plentiful than the animals themselves—although in regions where tracking is especially difficult

deer are often jumped without any sign having been seen at all. Usually, however, the rule is the reverse, and as deer are likely to make any quantity of tracks the beginner is apt, judging purely from the sign, greatly to overestimate their number. Another mistake of the beginner is to look for the deer during the daytime in the places where their tracks were made in the morning, when their day beds will probably be a long distance off. In the night-time deer will lie down almost anywhere, but during the day they go some distance from their feeding- or watering-places, as already explained.

If deer are at all plenty—and if scarce only a master in the art can succeed at still-hunting—it is best not to try to follow the tracks at all, but merely to hunt carefully through any ground which from its looks seems likely to contain the animals. Of course, the hunting must be done either against or across the wind, and the greatest care must be taken to avoid making a noise. Moccasins should be worn, and not a twig should be trodden on, nor should the dress be allowed to catch in a brush. Especial caution should be used in going over a ridge or crest; no man should ever let his whole body appear at once, but should first carefully peep over, not letting his rifle barrel come into view, and closely inspect every place in sight in which a deer could possibly stand or

lie, always remembering that a deer is, when still, a most difficult animal to see, and that it will be completely hidden in cover which would apparently hardly hold a rabbit. The rifle should be carried habitually so that the sun will not glance upon it. Advantage must be taken, in walking, of all cover, so that the hunter will not be a conspicuous object at any distance. The heads of a series of brushy ravines should always be crossed; and a narrow, winding valley, with patches of bushes and young trees down through the middle, is always a likely place. Caution should never for a moment be forgotten, especially in the morning or evening, the times when a hunter will get nine tenths of his shots; for it is just then, when moving and feeding, that deer are most watchful. One will never browse for more than a minute or two without raising its head and peering about for any possible foe, the great, sensitive ears thrown forward to catch the slightest sound. But while using such caution it is also well to remember that as much ground should be crossed as possible; other things being equal, the number of shots obtained will correspond to the amount of country covered. And of course a man should be on the hunting-ground—not starting for the hunting-ground—by the time there is enough light by which to shoot.

Deer are in season for hunting from August first

to January first. August is really too early to get full enjoyment out of the sport. The bucks, though fat and good eating, are still in the velvet; and neither does nor fawns should be killed, as many of the latter are in the spotted coat. Besides, it is very hot in the middle of the day, though pleasant walking in the early morning and late evening, and with cool nights. December is apt to be too cold, although with many fine days. The true time for the chase of the black-tail is in the three fall months. Then the air is fresh and bracing, and a man feels as if he could walk or ride all day long without tiring. In the bright fall weather the country no longer keeps its ordinary look of parched desolation, and the landscape loses its sameness at the touch of the frost. Where everything before had been gray or dull green there are now patches of russet red and bright yellow. The clumps of ash, wild plum-trees, and rose-bushes in the heads and bottoms of the sloping valleys become spots of color that glow among the stretches of brown and withered grass; the young cottonwoods, growing on the points of land round which flow the rivers and streams, change to a delicate green or yellow, on which the eye rests with pleasure after having so long seen only the dull drab of the prairies. Often there will be days of bitter cold, when a man who sleeps out in the open feels

the need of warm furs; but still more often there will be days and days of sunny weather, not cold enough to bring discomfort, but yet so cold that the blood leaps briskly through a man's veins and makes him feel that to be out and walking over the hills is a pleasure in itself, even were he not in hopes of any moment seeing the sun glint on the horns and hide of some mighty buck, as it rises to face the intruder. On days such as these, mere life is enjoyment; and on days such as these, the life of a hunter is at its pleasantest and best.

Many black-tail are sometimes killed in a day. I have never made big bags myself, for I rarely hunt except for a fine head or when we need meat, and, if it can be avoided, do not shoot at fawns or does; so the greatest number I have ever killed in a day was three. This was late one November, on an occasion when our larder was running low. My foreman and I, upon discovering this fact, determined to make a trip next day back in the broken country, away from the river, where black-tail were almost sure to be found.

We breakfasted hours before sunrise, and then mounted our horses and rode up the river bottom. The bright prairie moon was at the full, and was sunk in the west till it hung like a globe of white fire over the long row of jagged bluffs that rose from across the river, while its beams brought into fantastic relief the peaks and crests of the

buttes upon our left. The valley of the river itself was in partial darkness, and the stiff, twisted branches of the sage-brush seemed to take on uncanny shapes as they stood in the hollows. The cold was stinging, and we let our willing horses gallop with loose reins, their hoofs ringing on the frozen ground. After going up a mile or two along the course of the river we turned off to follow the bed of a large dry creek. At its mouth was a great space of ground much cut up by the hoofs of the cattle, which was in summer overflowed and almost a morass; but now the frost-bound earth was like wrinkled iron beneath the horses' feet. Behind us the westering moon sank down out of sight; and with no light but that of the stars, we let our horses tread their own way up the creek bottom. When we had gone a couple of miles from the river the sky in front of our faces took on a faint grayish tinge, the forerunner of dawn. Every now and then we passed by bunches of cattle, lying down or standing huddled together in the patches of brush or under the lee of some shelving bank or other wind-break; and as the eastern heavens grew brighter, a dark form suddenly appeared against the sky-line, on the crest of a bluff directly ahead of us. Another and another came up beside it. A glance told us that it was a troop of ponies, which stood motionless, like so many silhouettes, their outstretched necks

and long tails vividly outlined against the light behind them. All in the valley was yet dark when we reached the place where the creek began to split up and branch out into the various arms and ravines from which it headed. We galloped smartly over the divide into a set of coulies and valleys which ran into a different creek, and selected a grassy place where there was good feed to leave the horses. My companion picketed his; Manitou needed no picketing.

The tops of the hills were growing rosy, but the sun was not yet above the horizon when we started off, with our rifles on our shoulders, walking in cautious silence, for we were in good ground and might at any moment see a deer. Above us was a plateau of some size, breaking off sharply at the rim into a surrounding stretch of very rough and rugged country. It sent off low spurs with notched crests into the valleys round about, and its edges were indented with steep ravines and half-circular basins, their sides covered with clusters of gnarled and wind-beaten cedars, often gathered into groves of some size. The ground was so broken as to give excellent cover under which a man could approach game unseen; there were plenty of fresh signs of deer; and we were confident we should soon get a shot. Keeping at the bottom of the gullies, so as to be ourselves inconspicuous, we walked noiselessly on, cautiously

examining every pocket or turn before we rounded the corner, and looking with special care along the edges of the patches of brush.

At last, just as the sun had risen, we came out by the mouth of a deep ravine or hollow, cut in the flank of the plateau, with steep, cedar-clad sides; and on the crest of a jutting spur, not more than thirty yards from where I stood, was a black-tail doe, half facing me. I was in the shadow, and for a moment she could not make me out, and stood motionless with her head turned toward me and her great ears thrown forward. Dropping on my knee, I held the rifle a little back of her shoulder—too far back, as it proved, as she stood quartering and not broadside to me. No fairer chance could ever fall to the lot of a hunter; but, to my intense chagrin, she bounded off at the report as if unhurt, disappearing instantly. My companion had now come up, and we ran up a rise of ground, and crouched down beside a great block of sandstone, in a position from which we overlooked the whole ravine or hollow. After some minutes of quiet watchfulness, we heard a twig snap—the air was so still we could hear anything—some rods up the ravine, but below us; and immediately afterward a buck stole out of the cedars. Both of us fired at once, and with a convulsive spring he rolled over backward, one bullet having gone through his neck, and the

other—probably mine—having broken a hind leg. Immediately afterward, another buck broke from the upper edge of the cover, near the top of the plateau, and, though I took a hurried shot at him, bounded over the crest, and was lost to sight.

We now determined to go down into the ravine and look for the doe, and as there was a good deal of snow in the bottom and under the trees, we knew we could soon tell if she were wounded. After a little search we found her track, and walking along it a few yards, came upon some drops and then a splash of blood. There being no need to hurry, we first dressed the dead buck —a fine, fat fellow, but with small misshapen horns—and then took up the trail of the wounded doe. Here, however, I again committed an error, and paid too much heed to the trail and too little to the country round about; and, while following it with my eyes down on the ground in a place where it was faint, the doe got up some distance ahead and to one side of me, and bounded off round a corner of the ravine. The bed where she had lain was not very bloody, but from the fact of her having stopped so soon, I was sure she was badly wounded. However, after she got out of the snow the ground was as hard as flint, and it was impossible to track her; the valley soon took a turn, and branched into a tangle of coulies and ravines. I deemed it probable that she would

not go up the hill, but would run down the course of the main valley; but as it was so uncertain, we thought it would pay us best to look for a new deer.

Our luck, however, seemed—very deservedly—to have ended. We tramped on, as swiftly as was compatible with quiet, for hour after hour; beating through the valleys against the wind, and crossing the brushy heads of the ravines, sometimes close together, and sometimes keeping about a hundred yards apart, according to the nature of the ground. When we had searched all through the country round the head of the creek, into which we had come down, we walked over to the next, and went over it with equal care and patience. The morning was now well advanced, and we had to change our method of hunting. It was no longer likely that we should find the deer feeding or in the open, and instead we looked for places where they might be expected to bed, following any trails that led into thick patches of brush or young trees, one of us then hunting through the patch while the other kept watch without. Doubtless we must have passed close to more than one deer, and doubtless others heard us and skulked off through the thick cover; but, although we saw plenty of signs, we saw neither hoof nor hair of living thing. It is under such circumstances that a still-hunter needs to show

resolution, and to persevere until his luck turns —this being a euphemistic way of saying: until he ceases to commit the various blunders which alarm the deer and make them get out of the way. Plenty of good shots become disgusted if they do not see a deer early in the morning, and go home; still more, if they do not see one in two or three days. Others will go on hunting, but become careless, stumble and step on dried sticks, and let their eyes fall to the ground. It is a good test of a man's resolution to see if, at the end of a long and unsuccessful tramp after deer, he moves just as carefully, and keeps just as sharp a look-out as he did at the beginning. If he does this, and exercises a little common-sense—in still-hunting, as in everything else, common-sense is the most necessary of qualities,—he may be sure that his reward will come some day; and when it does come, he feels a gratification that only his fellow-sportsmen can understand.

We lunched at the foot of a great clay butte, where there was a bed of snow. Fall or winter hunting in the Bad Lands has one great advantage; the hunter is not annoyed by thirst as he is almost sure to be if walking for long hours under the blazing summer sun. If he gets very thirsty, a mouthful or two of snow from some hollow will moisten his lips and throat; and anyhow, thirstiness is largely a mere matter of habit. For lunch,

the best thing a hunter can carry is dried or smoked venison, with not too much salt in it. It is much better than bread, and not nearly so dry; and it is easier to carry, as a couple of pieces can be thrust into the bosom of the hunting shirt or the pocket, or in fact anywhere; and for keeping up a man's strength there is nothing that comes up to it.

After lunch we hunted until the shadows began to lengthen out, when we went back to our horses. The buck was packed behind good old Manitou, who can carry any amount of weight at a smart pace, and does not care at all if a strap breaks and he finds his load dangling about his feet, an event that reduces most horses to a state of frantic terror. As soon as loaded, we rode down the valley into which the doe had disappeared in the morning, one taking each side and looking into every possible lurking place. The odds were all against our finding any trace of her; but a hunter soon learns that he must take advantage of every chance, however slight. This time we were rewarded for our care; for after riding about a mile our attention was attracted by a white patch in a clump of low briars. On getting off and looking in it proved to be the white rump of the doe, which lay stretched out inside, stark and stiff. The ball had gone in too far aft and had come out on the opposite side near her hip, making a

mortal wound, but one which allowed her to run over a mile before dying. It was little more than an accident that we in the end got her; and my so nearly missing at such short range was due purely to carelessness and bad judgment. I had killed too many deer to be at all nervous over them, and was as cool with a buck as with a rabbit; but as she was so close I made the common mistake of being too much in a hurry, and did not wait to see that she was standing quartering to me, and that, consequently, I should aim at the point of the shoulder. As a result, the deer was nearly lost.

Neither of my shots had so far done me much credit; but, at any rate, I had learned where the error lay, and this is going a long way toward correcting it. I kept wishing that I could get another chance to see if I had not profited by my lessons; and before we reached home my wish was gratified. We were loping down a grassy valley, dotted with clumps of brush, the wind blowing strong in our faces, and deadening the noise made by the hoofs on the grass. As we passed by a piece of broken ground a yearling black-tail buck jumped into view and cantered away. I was off Manitou's back in an instant. The buck was moving slowly, and was evidently soon going to stop and look around, so I dropped on one knee, with my rifle half raised, and waited.

When about sixty yards off he halted and turned sideways to me, offering a beautiful broadside shot. I aimed at the spot just behind the shoulder and felt I had him. At the report he went off, but with short, weak bounds, and I knew he would not go far; nor did he, but stopped short, swayed unsteadily about, and went over on his side, dead, the bullet clean through his body.

Each of us already had a deer behind his saddle, so we could not take the last buck along with us. Accordingly, we dressed him, and hung him up by the heels to a branch of a tree, piling the brush around as if building a slight pen or trap, to keep off the coyotes; who, anyhow, are not apt to harm game that is hanging up, their caution seeming to make them fear that it will not be safe to do so. In such cold weather a deer hung up in this way will keep an indefinite length of time; and the carcass was all right when, a week or two afterwards, we sent out the buckboard to bring it back.

A stout buckboard is very useful on a ranch, where men are continually taking short trips on which they do not wish to be encumbered by the heavy ranch wagon. Pack ponies are always a nuisance, though of course an inevitable one in making journeys through mountains or forests. But on the plains a buckboard is far more handy. The blankets and provisions can be loaded upon

it, and it can then be given a definite course to travel or point to reach; and meanwhile the hunters, without having their horses tired by carrying heavy packs, can strike off and hunt wherever they wish. There is little or no difficulty in going over the prairie, but it needs a skilful plainsman, as well as a good teamster, to take a wagon through the Bad Lands. There are but two courses to follow. One is to go along the bottoms of the valleys; the other is to go along the tops of the divides. The latter is generally the best; for each valley usually has at its bottom a deep winding ditch, with perpendicular banks, which wanders first to one side and then to the other, and has to be crossed again and again, while a little way from it begin the gullies and gulches which come down from the side hills. It is no easy matter to tell which is the main divide, as it curves and twists about, and is all the time splitting up into lesser ones, which merely separate two branches of the same creek. If the teamster does not know the lay of the land he will be likely to find himself in a *cul-de-sac*, from which he can only escape by going back a mile or two and striking out afresh. In very difficult country the horsemen must be on hand to help the team pull up the steep places. Many horses that will not pull a pound in harness will haul for all there is in them from the saddle; Manitou is a

case in point. Often obstacles will be encountered across which it is simply impossible for any team to drag a loaded or even an empty wagon. Such are steep canyons, or muddy-bottomed streams with sheer banks, especially if the latter have rotten edges. The horses must then be crossed first and the wagon dragged over afterward by the aid of long ropes. Often it may be needful to build a kind of rude bridge or causeway on which to get the animals over; and if the canyon is very deep the wagon may have to be taken in pieces, let down one side, and hauled up the other. An immense amount of labor may be required to get over a very trifling distance. Pack animals, however, can go almost anywhere that a man can.

Although still-hunting on foot, as described above, is on the whole the best way to get deer, yet there are many places where, from the nature of the land, the sport can be followed quite as well on horseback, than which there is no more pleasant kind of hunting. The best shot I ever made in my life—a shot into which, however, I am afraid the element of chance entered much more largely than the element of skill—was made while hunting black-tail on horseback.

We were at that time making quite a long trip with the wagon, and were going up the fork of a plains river in Western Montana. As we were out of food, those two of our number who usually

undertook to keep the camp supplied with game determined to make a hunt off back of the river after black-tail; for though there were some white-tail in the more densely timbered river bottoms, we had been unable to get any. It was arranged that the wagon should go on a few miles, and then halt for the night, as it was already the middle of the afternoon when we started out. The country resembled in character other parts of the cattle plains, but it was absolutely bare of trees except along the bed of the river. The rolling hills sloped steeply off into long valleys and deep ravines. They were sparsely covered with coarse grass, and also with an irregular growth of tall sage-brush, which in some places gathered into dense thickets. A beginner would have thought the country entirely too barren of cover to hold deer, but a very little experience teaches one that deer will be found in thickets of such short and sparse growth that it seems as if they could hide nothing; and, what is more, that they will often skulk round in such thickets without being discovered. And a black-tail is a bold, free animal, liking to go out in comparatively open country, where he must trust to his own powers, and not to any concealment, to protect him from danger.

Where the hilly country joined the alluvial river bottom, it broke short off into steep bluffs,

up which none but a Western pony could have climbed. It is really wonderful to see what places a pony can get over, and the indifference with which it regards tumbles. In getting up from the bottom we went into a wash-out, and then led our ponies along a clay ledge, from which we turned off and went straight up a very steep sandy bluff. My companion was ahead; just as he turned off the ledge, and as I was right underneath him, his horse, in plunging to try to get up the sand bluff, overbalanced itself, and, after standing erect on its hind legs for a second, came over backward. The second's pause while it stood bolt upright, gave me time to make a frantic leap out of the way with my pony, which scrambled after me, and we clung with hands and hoofs to the side of the bank, while the other horse took two as complete somersaults as I ever saw, and landed with a crash at the bottom of the wash-out, feet uppermost. I thought it was done for, but not a bit. After a moment or two it struggled to its legs, shook itself, and looked round in rather a shame-faced way, apparently not in the least the worse for the fall. We now got my pony up to the top by vigorous pulling, and then went down for the other, which at first strongly objected to making another trial, but, after much coaxing and a good deal of abuse, took a start and went up without trouble.

For some time after reaching the top of the bluffs we rode along without seeing anything. When it was possible, we kept one on each side of a creek, avoiding the tops of the ridges, because while on them a horseman can be seen at a very long distance, and going with particular caution whenever we went round a spur or came up over a crest. The country stretched away like an endless, billowy sea of dull-brown soil and barren sage-brush, the valleys making long parallel furrows, and everything having a look of dreary sameness. At length, as we came out on a rounded ridge, three black-tail bucks started up from a lot of sage-brush some two hundred yards away and below us, and made off down hill. It was a very long shot, especially to try running, but, as game seemed scarce and cartridges were plenty, I leaped off the horse, and, kneeling, fired. The bullet went low, striking in a line at the feet of the hindmost. I held very high next time, making a wild shot above and ahead of them, which had the effect of turning them, and they went off round a shoulder of a bluff, being by this time down in the valley. Having plenty of time I elevated the sights (a thing I hardly ever do) to four hundred yards and waited for their reappearance. Meanwhile, they had evidently gotten over their fright, for pretty soon one walked out from the other side of the bluff, and came to a

standstill, broadside toward me. He was too far off for me to see his horns. As I was raising the rifle another stepped out and began to walk towards the first. I thought I might as well have as much of a target as possible to shoot at, and waited for the second buck to come out farther, which he did immediately and stood still just alongside of the first. I aimed above his shoulders and pulled the trigger. Over went the two bucks! And when I rushed down to where they lay I found I had pulled a little to one side, and the bullet had broken the backs of both. While my companion was dressing them I went back and paced off the distance. It was just four hundred and thirty-one long paces; over four hundred yards. Both were large bucks and very fat, with the velvet hanging in shreds from their antlers, for it was late in August. The day was waning and we had a long ride back to the wagon, each with a buck behind his saddle. When we came back to the river valley it was pitch dark, and it was rather ticklish work for our heavily laden horses to pick their way down the steep bluffs and over the rapid streams; nor were we sorry when we saw ahead under a bluff the gleam of the camp fire, as it was reflected back from the canvas-topped prairie schooner, that for the time being represented home to us.

This was much the best shot I ever made; and

it is just such a shot as any one will occasionally make if he takes a good many chances and fires often at ranges where the odds are greatly against his hitting. I suppose I had fired a dozen times at animals four or five hundred yards off, and now, by the doctrine of chances, I happened to hit; but I would have been very foolish if I had thought for a moment that I had learned how to hit at over four hundred yards. I have yet to see the hunter who can hit with any regularity at that distance, when he has to judge it for himself; though I have seen plenty who could make such a long range hit now and then. And I have noticed that such a hunter, in talking over his experience, was certain soon to forget the numerous misses he made, and to say, and even to actually think, that his occasional hits represented his average shooting.

One of the finest black-tail bucks I ever shot was killed while lying out in a rather unusual place. I was hunting mountain-sheep, in a stretch of very high and broken country, and about midday crept cautiously up to the edge of a great gorge, whose sheer walls went straight down several hundred feet. Peeping over the brink of the chasm I saw a buck, lying out on a ledge so narrow as to barely hold him, right on the face of the cliff wall opposite, some distance below, and about seventy yards diagonally across

from me. He lay with his legs half stretched out, and his head turned so as to give me an exact centre-shot at his forehead, the bullet going in between his eyes, so that his legs hardly so much as twitched when he received it. It was toilsome and almost dangerous work climbing out to where he lay; I have never known any other individual, even of this bold and adventurous species of deer, to take its noonday siesta in a place so barren of all cover and so difficult of access even to the most sure-footed climber. This buck was as fat as a prize sheep, and heavier than any other I have ever killed; while his antlers also were, with two exceptions, the best I ever got.

# HUNTING TRIPS OF A RANCHMAN

**Bear at Elk Carcass.**

(Drawn by Henry Sandham.)

NEW LIBRARY EDITION

# HUNTING TRIPS OF A RANCHMAN

AN ACCOUNT OF THE BIG GAME OF THE UNITED STATES AND ITS CHASE WITH HORSE, HOUND AND RIFLE

BY

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

IN TWO VOLUMES

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# HUNTING TRIPS OF A RANCHMAN

# HUNTING TRIPS OF A RANCHMAN

## CHAPTER I

### A TRIP ON THE PRAIRIE

NO antelope are found, except rarely, immediately round my ranch-house, where the ground is much too broken to suit them; but on the great prairies, ten or fifteen miles off, they are plentiful, though far from as abundant as they were a few years ago when the cattle were first driven into the land. By plainsmen they are called either prong-horn or antelope, but are most often known by the latter and much less descriptive title. Where they are found they are always very conspicuous figures in the landscape; for, far from attempting to conceal itself, an antelope really seems anxious to take up a prominent position, caring only to be able to itself see its foes. It is the smallest in size of the plains game, even smaller than a white-tail deer; and its hide is valueless, being thin and porus, and

making very poor buckskin. In its whole appearance and structure, it is a most singular creature. Unlike all other hollow-horned animals, it sheds its horns annually, exactly as the deer shed their solid antlers; but the shedding process in the prong-horn occupies but a very few days—so short a time, indeed, that many hunters stoutly deny that it takes place at all. The hair is of a remarkable texture, very long, coarse, and brittle; in the spring it comes off in handfuls. In strong contrast to the reddish yellow of the other parts of the body, the rump is pure white, and when alarmed or irritated every hair in the white patch bristles up on end, greatly increasing the apparent area of the color. The flesh, unlike that of any other plains animal, is equally good all through the year. In the fall it is hardly so juicy as deer venison, but in the spring, when no other kind of game is worth eating, it is perfectly good; and at that time of the year, if we have to get fresh meat, we would rather kill antelope than anything else; and as the bucks are always to be instantly distinguished from the does by their large horns, we confine ourselves to them, and so work no harm to the species.

The antelope is a queer-looking rather than a beautiful animal. The curious pronged horns, great bulging eyes, and strange bridle-like marks and bands on the face and throat are more strik-

ing, but less handsome, than the delicate head and branching antlers of a deer; and it entirely lacks the latter animal's grace of movement. In its form and look, when standing still, it is rather angular and goat-like, and its movements merely have the charm that comes from lightness, speed, and agility. Its gait is singularly regular and even, without any of the bounding, rolling movement of a deer; and it is, consequently, very easy to hit running, compared with other kinds of game.

Antelope possess a most morbid curiosity. The appearance of anything out of the way, or to which they are not accustomed, often seems to drive them nearly besides themselves with mingled fright and desire to know what it is, a combination of feelings that throws them into a perfect panic, during whose continuance they will at times seem utterly unable to take care of themselves. In very remote, wild places, to which no white man often penetrates, the appearance of a white-topped wagon will be enough to excite this feeling in the prong-horn, and in such cases it is not unusual for a herd to come up and circle round the strange object, heedless of rifle-shots. This curiosity is particularly strong in the bucks during rutting-time, and one method of hunting them is to take advantage of it, and "flag" them up to the hunters by waving a red handkerchief or some other object to and fro in the air. In very wild

places they can sometimes be flagged up, even after they have seen the man; but, elsewhere, the latter must keep himself carefully concealed behind a ridge or hillock, or in tall grass, and keep cautiously waving the handkerchief overhead. The antelope will look fixedly at it, stamp, snort, start away, come nearer by fits and starts, and run from one side to the other, the better to see it. Sometimes a wary old buck will keep this up for half an hour, and at the end make off; but again, the attraction may prove too strong, and the antelope comes slowly on until within rifle-shot. This method of hunting, however, is not so much practised now as formerly, as the antelope are getting continually shyer and more difficult to flag. I have never myself shot one in this manner, though I have often seen the feat performed, and have several times tried it myself, but always with the result that after I had made my arm really weak with waving the handkerchief to and fro, the antelope, which had been shifting about just out of range, suddenly took to its heels and made off.

No other kind of plains game, except the bighorn, is as shy and sharp-sighted as the antelope; and both its own habits and the open nature of the ground on which it is found render it peculiarly difficult to stalk. There is no cover, and if a man is once seen by the game the latter will not

let him get out of sight again, unless it decides to go off at a gait that soon puts half a dozen miles between them. It shifts its position, so as to keep the hunter continually in sight. Thus, if it is standing on a ridge, and the hunter disappear into a ravine up which he intends to crawl, the antelope promptly gallops off to some other place of observation from which its foe is again visible; and this is repeated until the animal at last makes up its mind to start for good. It keeps up an incessant watch, being ever on the lookout for danger, far or near; and as it can see an immense distance, and has its home on ground so level that a horseman can be made out a mile off, its attention is apt to be attracted when still four or five rifle-shots beyond range, and after it has once caught a glimpse of the foe, the latter might as well give up all hopes of getting the game.

But while so much more wary than deer, it is also at times much more foolish, and has certain habits—some of which, such as its inordinate curiosity and liability to panic, have already been alluded to—that tend to its destruction. Ordinarily, it is a far more difficult feat to kill an antelope than it is to kill a deer, but there are times when the former can be slaughtered in such numbers that it becomes mere butchery.

The prong-horn is pre-eminently a gregarious

animal. It is found in bands almost all the year through. During the two or three days after he has shed his horns, and while the new ones are growing, the buck retires to some out-of-the-way spot, and while bringing forth her fawns the doe stays by herself. But as soon as possible each again rejoins the band; and the fawns become members of it at a remarkably early age. In the late fall, when the bitter cold has begun, a large number of these bands collect together, and immense herds are formed which last throughout the winter. Thus at this season a man may travel for days through regions where antelope are most plentiful during the hot months and never see one; but if he does come across any they will be apt to be in great numbers, most probably along the edge of the Bad Lands, where the ground is rolling rather than broken, but where there is some shelter from the furious winter gales. Often they will even come down to the river bottom or find their way up to some plateau. They now always hang closely about the places they have chosen for their winter haunts, and seem very reluctant to leave them. They go in dense herds, and when starved and weak with cold are less shy; and can often be killed in great numbers by any one who has found out where they are—though a true sportsman will not molest them at this season.

Sometimes a small number of individuals will at this time get separated from the main herd, and take up their abode in some place by themselves; and when they have once done so it is almost impossible to drive them away. Last winter a solitary prong-horn strayed into the river-bottom at the mouth of a wide creek-valley, half a mile from my ranch, and stayed there for three months, keeping with the cattle, and always being found within a mile of the same spot. A little band at the same time established itself on a large plateau, about five miles long by two miles wide, some distance up the river above me, and afforded fine sport to a couple of ranchmen who lived not far from its base. The antelope, twenty or thirty in number, would not leave the plateau, which lies in the midst of broken ground; for it is a peculiarity of these animals, which will be spoken of further on, that they will try to keep in the open ground at any cost or hazard. The two ranchmen agreed never to shoot at the antelope on foot, but only to try to kill them from horseback, either with their revolvers or their Winchesters. They thus hunted them for the sake of the sport purely; and certainly they got plenty of fun out of them. Very few horses indeed are as fast as a prong-horn; and these few did not include any owned by either of my two friends. But the antelope were always being obliged to break back

from the edge of the plateau, and so were forced constantly to offer opportunities for cutting them off; and these opportunities were still further increased by the two hunters separating. One of them would go to the upper end of the plateau and start the band, riding after them at full speed. They would distance him, but would be checked in their career by coming to the brink of the cliff; then they would turn at an angle and give their pursuer a chance to cut them off; and if they kept straight up the middle the other hunter would head them. When a favorable moment came the hunters would dash in as close as possible and empty their revolvers or repeaters into the herd; but it is astonishing how hard it is, when riding a horse at full speed, to hit any object, unless it is directly under the muzzle of the weapon. The number of cartridges spent compared to the number of prong-horn killed was enormous; but the fun and excitement of the chase were the main objects with my friends, to whom the actual killing of the game was of entirely secondary importance. They went out after them about a dozen times during the winter, and killed in all ten or fifteen prong-horns.

A prong-horn is by far the fleetest animal on the plains; one can outrun and outlast a deer with the greatest ease. Very swift greyhounds can overtake them, if hunted in leashes or couples;

but only a remarkably good dog can run one down single-handed. Besides, prong-horn are most plucky little creatures, and will make a most resolute fight against a dog or wolf, striking with their fore feet and punching with their not very formidable horns, and are so quick and wiry as to be really rather hard to master.

Antelope have the greatest objection to going on anything but open ground, and seem to be absolutely unable to make a high jump. If a band is caught feeding in the bottom of a valley leading into a plain they invariably make a rush to the mouth, even if the foe is stationed there, and will run heedlessly by him, no matter how narrow the mouth is, rather than not try to reach the open country. It is almost impossible to force them into even a small patch of brush, and they will face almost certain death rather than try to leap a really very trifling obstacle. If caught in a glade surrounded by a slight growth of brushwood, they make no effort whatever to get through or over this growth, but dash frantically out through the way by which they got in. Often the deer, especially the black-tail, will wander out on the edge of the plain frequented by antelope; and it is curious to see the two animals separate the second there is an alarm, the deer making for the broken country, while the antelope scud for the level plains. Once two of my

men nearly caught a couple of antelope in their hands. They were out driving in the buckboard, and saw two antelope, a long distance ahead, enter the mouth of a wash-out (a canyon *in petto*); they had strayed away from the prairie to the river bottom, and were evidently feeling lost. My two men did not think much of the matter, but when opposite the mouth of the wash-out, which was only thirty feet or so wide, they saw the two antelopes starting to come out, having found that it was a blind passage, with no outlet at the other end. Both men jumped out of the buckboard and ran to the entrance; the two antelope dashed frantically to and fro inside the wash-out. The sides were steep, but a deer would have scaled them at once; yet the antelope seemed utterly unable to do this, and finally broke out past the two men and got away. They came so close that the men were able to touch each of them, but their movements were too quick to permit of their being caught.

However, though unable to leap any height, an antelope can skim across a level jump like a bird, and will go over water-courses and wash-outs that very few horses indeed will face. A mountain-sheep, on the other hand, is a marvellous vertical leaper; the black-tail deer comes next; the white-tail is pretty good, and the elk is at any rate better than the antelope; but when

it comes to horizontal jumping the latter can beat them all.

In May or early June the doe brings forth her fawns, usually two in number, for she is very prolific. She makes her bed in some valley or hollow, and keeps with the rest of the band, only returning to the fawns to feed them. They lie out in the grass or under some slight bush, but are marvellously hard to find. By instinct they at once know how to crouch down so as to be as inconspicuous as possible. Once we scared away a female prong-horn from an apparently perfectly level hill side; and in riding along passed over the spot she had left and came upon two little fawns that could have been but a few hours old. They lay flat in the grass, with their legs doubled under them and their necks and heads stretched out on the ground. When we took them up and handled them, they soon got used to us and moved awkwardly round, but at any sudden noise or motion they would immediately squat flat down again. But at a very early age the fawns learn how to shift for themselves, and can then run almost as fast as their parents, even when no larger than a jack-rabbit. Once, while we were haying, a couple of my cowboys spent half an hour in trying to run down and capture a little fawn, but they were unable to catch it, it ran so fast and ducked about so quickly. Antelope

fawns are very easily tamed and make most amusing pets. We have had two or three, but have never succeeded in rearing any of them; but some of the adjoining ranchmen have been more fortunate. They are not nearly so pretty as deer fawns, having long, gangling legs and angular bodies, but they are much more familiar and interesting. One of my neighbors has three live prong-horns, as well as two little spotted white-tail deer. The deer fawns are always skulking about, and are by no means such bold inquisitive little creatures as the small antelope are. The latter have a nurse in the shape of a fat old ewe; and it is funny to see her, when alarmed, running off at a waddling gait, while her ungainly little foster-children skip round and round her, cutting the most extraordinary antics. There are a couple of very large dogs, mastiffs, on the place, whose natural solemnity is completely disconcerted by the importunities and fearlessness of the little antelope fawns. Where one goes the other two always follow, and so one of the mastiffs, while solemnly blinking in the sun, will suddenly find himself charged at full speed by the three queer little creatures, who will often fairly butt up against him. The uneasy look of the dog, and his efforts to get out of the way without compromising his dignity, are really very comical.

Young fawns seem to give out no scent, and

thus many of them escape from the numerous carnivorous beasts that are ever prowling about at night over the prairie, and which, during the spring months, are always fat from feeding on the bodies of the innocents they have murdered. If discovered by a fox or coyote during its first few days of existence a little fawn has no chance of life, although the mother, if present, will fight desperately for it; but after it has acquired the use of its legs it has no more to fear than have any of the older ones.

Sometimes the fawns fall victims to the great golden eagle. This grand bird, the war eagle of the Sioux, is not very common in the Bad Lands, but is sometimes still seen with us; and, as everywhere else, its mere presence adds a certain grandeur to its lonely haunts. Two or three years ago a nest was found by one of my men on the face of an almost inaccessible cliff, and a young bird was taken out from it and reared in a roughly extemporized cage. Wherever the eagle exists it holds undisputed sway over everything whose size does not protect it from the great bird's beak and talons; not only does it feed on hares, grouse, and ducks, but it will also attack the young fawns of the deer and antelope. Still, the eagle is but an occasional foe, and, aside from man, the only formidable enemies the antelope has to fear are the wolves and coyotes. These are very destructive

to the young, and are always lounging about the band to pick up any wounded straggler; in winter, when the ground is slippery and the antelope numbed and weak, they will often commit great havoc even among those that are grown up.

The voice of the antelope is not at all like that of the deer. Instead of bleating it utters a quick, harsh noise, a kind of bark; a little like the sound "kau," sharply and clearly repeated. It can be heard a long distance off; and is usually uttered when the animal is a little startled or surprised by the presence of something it does not understand.

The prong-horn cannot go without water any longer than a deer can, and will go great distances to get it; for space is nothing to a traveller with such speed and such last. No matter how dry and barren may be the desert in which antelope are found, it may be taken for granted that they are always within reaching distance of some spring or pool of water, and that they visit it once a day. Once or twice I have camped out by some pool, which was the only one for miles around, and in every such case have been surprised at night by the visits of the antelope, who, on finding that their drinking-place was tenanted, would hover round at a short distance, returning again and again and continually uttering the barking "kau, kau," until they became convinced that there was

no hope of their getting in, when they would set off at a run for some other place.

Prong-horn perhaps prefer the rolling prairies of short grass as their home, but seem to do almost equally well on the desolate and monotonous wastes where the sage-brush and prickly pear and a few blades of coarse grass are the only signs of plant life to be seen. In such places, the prong-horn, the sage-cock, the rattlesnake, and the horned frog alone are able to make out a livelihood.

The horned frog is not a frog at all, but a lizard, —a queer, stumpy little fellow with spikes all over the top of its head and back, and given to moving in the most leisurely manner imaginable. Nothing will make it hurry. If taken home it becomes a very tame and quaint but also very uninteresting little pet.

Rattlesnakes are only too plentiful everywhere; along the river bottoms, in the broken, hilly ground, and on the prairies and the great desert wastes alike. Every cowboy kills dozens each season. To a man wearing top-boots there is little or no danger while he is merely walking about, for the fangs cannot go through the leather, and the snake does not strike as high as the knee. Indeed, the rattlesnake is not nearly as dangerous as are most poisonous serpents, for it always gives fair warning before striking, and is both sluggish

and timid. If it can, it will get out of the way, and only coils up in its attitude of defence when it believes that it is actually menaced. It is, of course, however, both a dangerous and a disagreeable neighbor, and one of its annoying traits is the fondness it displays for crawling into a hut or taking refuge among the blankets left out on the ground. Except in such cases, men are rarely in danger from it, unless they happen to be stooping over, as was the case with one of my cowboys who had leaned over to pick up a log, and was almost bitten by a snake which was underneath it; or unless the snake is encountered while stalking an animal. Once I was creeping up to an antelope under cover of some very low sage-brush —so low that I had to lie flat on my face and push myself along with my hands and feet. While cautiously moving on in this way I was electrified by hearing almost by my ears the well-known ominous "whir-r-r" of a rattlesnake, and on hastily glancing up there was the reptile, not ten feet away from me, all coiled up and waiting. I backed off and crawled to one side, the rattler turning its head round to keep watch over my movements; when the stalk was over (the antelope took alarm and ran off before I was within rifle-shot) I came back, hunted up the snake, and killed it. Although I have known of several men being bitten, I know of but one case where

the bite caused the death of a human being. This was a girl who had been out milking, and was returning, in bare feet; the snake struck her just above the ankle, and in her fright she fell and was struck again in the neck. The double wound was too much for her, and the poison killed her in the course of a couple of hours.

Occasionally, one meets a rattlesnake whose rattle has been lost or injured; and such a one is always dangerous, because it strikes without warning. I once nearly lost a horse by the bite of one of these snakes without rattles. I was riding along a path when my horse gave a tremendous start and jump; looking back, I saw that it had been struck by a rattlesnake with an injured tail, which had been lying hid in a bunch of grass, directly beside the path. Luckily, it had merely hit the hard hoof, breaking one of its fangs.

Horses differ very much in their conduct toward snakes. Some show great fright at sight of them or on hearing their rattles, plunging and rearing and refusing to go anywhere near the spot; while others have no fear of them at all, being really perfectly stupid about them. Manitou does not lose his wits at all over them, but at the same time takes very good care not to come within striking distance.

Ranchmen often suffer some loss among their

stock owing to snake-bites, both horned cattle and horses, in grazing, frequently coming on snakes and having their noses or cheeks bitten. Generally, these wounds are not fatal, though very uncomfortable; it is not uncommon to see a woe-begone looking mule with its head double the natural size, in consequence of having incautiously browsed over a snake. A neighbor lost a weak pony in this way; and one of our best steers also perished from the same cause. But in the latter case, the animal, like the poor girl spoken of above, had received two wounds with the poison fangs; apparently it had, while grazing with its head down, been first struck in the nose, and been again struck in the foreleg as it started away.

Of all kinds of hunting, the chase of the antelope is pre-eminently that requiring skill in the use of the rifle at long range. The distance at which shots have to be taken in antelope hunting is at least double the ordinary distance at which deer are fired at. In pursuing most other kinds of game, a hunter who is not a good shot may still do excellent work; but in prong-horn hunting, no man can make even a fairly good record unless he is a skilful marksman. I have myself done but little hunting after antelopes, and have not, as a rule, been very successful in the pursuit.

Ordinary hounds are rarely, or never, used to

chase this game; but coursing it with greyhounds is as manly and exhilarating a form of sport as can be imagined,—a much better way of hunting it than is shooting it with the rifle, which latter, though needing more skill in the actual use of the weapon, is in every other respect greatly inferior as a sport to still-hunting the black-tail or big-horn.

I never but once took a trip of any length with antelope hunting for its chief object. This was one June, when all the men were away on the round-up. As is usual during the busy half of the ranchman's year, the spring and summer, when men have no time to hunt, and game is out of condition, we had been living on salt pork, beans, potatoes, and bread; and I had hardly had a rifle in my hand for months; so, finding I had a few days to spare, I thought I should take a short trip on the prairie, in the beautiful June weather, and get a little sport and a little fresh meat out of the bands of prong-horn bucks which I was sure to encounter. Intending to be gone but a couple of days, it was not necessary to take many articles. Behind my saddle I carried a blanket for bedding, and an oilskin coat to ward off the wet; a large metal cup with the handle riveted, not soldered on, so that water could be boiled in it; a little tea and salt, and some biscuits; and a small waterproof bag containing my half-dozen

personal necessaries—not forgetting a book. The whole formed a small, light pack, very little encumbrance to stout old Manitou. In June, fair weather can generally be counted on in the dry plains country.

I started in the very earliest morning, when the intense brilliancy of the stars had just begun to pale before the first streak of dawn. By the time I left the river bottom and struck off up the valley of a winding creek, which led through the Bad Lands, the eastern sky was growing rosy; and soon the buttes and cliffs were lit up by the level rays of the cloudless summer sun. The air was fresh and sweet, and odorous with the sweet scents of the springtime that was but barely passed; the dew lay heavy, in glittering drops, on the leaves and the blades of grass, whose vivid green, at this season, for a short time brightens the desolate and sterile-looking wastes of the lonely Western plains. The rose-bushes were all in bloom, and their pink blossoms clustered in every point and bend of the stream; and the sweet, sad songs of the hermit thrushes rose from the thickets, while the meadow larks perched boldly in sight as they uttered their louder and more cheerful music. The round-up had passed by our ranch, and all the cattle with our brands—the Maltese cross and cut dewlap, or the elk-horn and triangle—had been turned loose; they had not

yet worked away from the river, and I rode by long strings of them, walking in single file off to the hills, or standing in groups to look at me as I passed.

Leaving the creek, I struck off among a region of scoria buttes, the ground rising into rounded hills, through whose grassy covering the red volcanic rock showed in places, while boulder-like fragments of it were scattered all through the valleys between. There were a few clumps of bushes here and there, and near one of them were two magpies, who lit on an old buffalo skull, bleached white by sun and snow. Magpies are birds that catch the eye at once from their bold black and white plumage and long tails; and they are very saucy and at the same time very cunning and shy. In spring we do not often see them; but in the late fall and winter they will come close round the huts and outbuildings on the lookout for anything to eat. If a deer is hung up and they can get at it they will pick it to pieces with their sharp bills; and their carnivorous tastes and their habit of coming round hunters' camps after the game that is left out, call to mind their kinsman, the whiskey-jack or moose-bird of the Northern forests.

After passing the last line of low, rounded scoria buttes, the horse stepped out on the border of the great, seemingly endless stretches of rolling

or nearly level prairie, over which I had planned to travel and hunt for the next two or three days. At intervals of ten or a dozen miles this prairie was crossed by dry creeks, with, in places in their beds, pools or springs of water, and alongside a spindling growth of trees and bushes; and my intention was to hunt across these creeks, and camp by some water-hole in one of them at night.

I rode over the land in a general southerly course, bending to the right or left according to the nature of the ground and the likelihood of finding game. Most of the time the horse kept on a steady single-foot, but this was varied by a sharp lope every now and then, to ease the muscles of both steed and rider. The sun was well up, and its beams beat fiercely down on our heads from out of the cloudless sky; for at this season, though the nights and the early morning and late evening are cool and pleasant, the hours around noon are very hot. My glass was slung alongside the saddle, and from every one of the scattered hillocks the country was scanned carefully far and near; and the greatest caution was used in riding up over any divide, to be sure that no game on the opposite side was scared by the sudden appearance of my horse or myself.

Nowhere, not even at sea, does a man feel more lonely than when riding over the far-reaching, seemingly never-ending plains; and after a man

has lived a little while on or near them, their very vastness and loneliness and their melancholy monotony have a strong fascination for him. The landscape seems always the same, and after the traveller has plodded on for miles and miles he gets to feel as if the distance was indeed boundless. As far as the eye can see there is no break; either the prairie stretches out into perfectly level flats, or else there are gentle, rolling slopes, whose crests mark the divides between the drainage systems of the different creeks; and when one of these is ascended, immediately another precisely like it takes its place in the distance, and so roll succeeds roll in a succession as interminable as that of the waves of the ocean. Nowhere else does one seem so far off from all mankind; the plains stretch out in death-like and measureless expanse, and as he journeys over them they will for many miles be lacking in all signs of life. Although he can see so far, yet all objects on the outermost verge of the horizon, even though within the ken of his vision, look unreal and strange; for there is no shade to take away from the bright glare, and at a little distance things seem to shimmer and dance in the hot rays of the sun. The ground is scorched to a dull brown, and against its monotonous expanse any objects stand out with a prominence that makes it difficult to judge of the distance at which they are.

A mile off one can see, through the strange shimmering haze, the shadowy white outlines of something which looms vaguely up till it looks as large as the canvas top of a prairie wagon; but as the horseman comes nearer it shrinks and dwindles and takes clearer form, until at last it changes into the ghastly staring skull of some mighty buffalo, long dead and gone to join the rest of his vanished race.

When the grassy prairies are left and the traveller enters a region of alkali desert and sage-brush, the look of the country becomes even more grim and forbidding. In places, the alkali forms a white frost on the ground that glances in the sunlight like the surface of a frozen lake; the dusty little sage-brush, stunted and dried up, sprawls over the parched ground, from which it can hardly extract the small amount of nourishment necessary for even its weazened life; the spiny cactus alone seems to be really in its true home. Yet even in such places antelope will be found, as alert and as abounding with vivacious life as elsewhere. Owing to the magnifying and distorting power of the clear, dry plains air, every object, no matter what its shape or color or apparent distance, needs the closest examination. A magpie sitting on a white skull, or a couple of ravens, will look, a quarter of a mile off, like some curious beast; and time and again a raw hunter will try

to stalk a lump of clay or a burnt stick; and after being once or twice disappointed he is apt to rush to the other extreme, and conclude too hastily that a given object is not an antelope, when it very possibly is.

During the morning I came in sight of several small bands or pairs of antelope. Most of them saw me as soon as or before I saw them, and after watching me with intense curiosity as long as I was in sight and at a distance, made off at once as soon as I went into a hollow or appeared to be approaching too near. Twice, in scanning the country narrowly with the glasses, from behind a sheltering divide, bands of prong-horn were seen that had not discovered me. In each case the horse was at once left to graze, while I started off after the game nearly a mile distant. For the first half mile I could walk upright or go along half stooping; then, as the distance grew less, I had to crawl on all fours and keep behind any little broken bank, or take advantage of a small, dry watercourse, and toward the end work my way flat on my face, wriggling like a serpent, using every stunted sage-brush or patch of cactus as a cover, bare-headed under the blazing sun. In each case, after nearly an hour's irksome, thirsty work, the stalk failed. One band simply ran off without a second's warning, alarmed at some awkward movement on my part, and without

giving a chance for a shot. In the other instance, while still at very long and uncertain range, I heard the sharp barking alarm-note of one of the prong-horn, the whole band instantly raising their heads and gazing intently at their would-be destroyer. They were a very long way off; but, seeing it was hopeless to try to get nearer, I rested my rifle over a little mound of earth and fired. The dust came up in a puff to one side of the nearest antelope; the whole band took a few jumps and turned again; the second shot struck at their feet, and they went off like so many race-horses, being missed again as they ran. I sat up by a sage-brush thinking they would of course not come back, when to my surprise I saw them wheel round with the precision of a cavalry squadron, all in line and fronting me, the white and brown markings on their heads and throats showing like the facings on soldiers' uniforms; and then back they came charging up till again within long range, when they wheeled their line as if on a pivot and once more made off, this time for good, not heeding an ineffectual fusillade from the Winchester. Antelope often go through a series of regular evolutions, like so many trained horsemen, wheeling, turning, halting, and running as if under command; and their coming back to again run the (as it proved very harmless) gauntlet of my fire was due either to curiosity or to one

of those panicky freaks which occasionally seize those ordinarily wary animals, and cause them to run into danger easily avoided by creatures commonly much more readily approached than they are. I had fired half a dozen shots without effect; but while no one ever gets over his feeling of self-indignation at missing an easy shot at close quarters, any one who hunts antelope and is not of a disposition so timid as never to take chances, soon learns that he has to expect to expend a good deal of powder and lead before bagging his game.

By mid-day I reached a dry creek and followed up its course for a mile or so, till a small spot of green in the side of a bank showed the presence of water, a little pool of which lay underneath. The ground was so rotten that it was with difficulty I could get Manitou down to where he could drink; but at last both of us satisfied our thirst, and he was turned loose to graze, with his saddle off, so as to cool his back, and I, after eating a biscuit, lay on my face on the ground—there was no shade of any sort near—and dozed until a couple of hours' rest and feed had put the horse in good trim for the afternoon ride. When it came to crossing over the dry creek on whose bank we had rested, we almost went down in a quicksand, and it was only by frantic struggles and flounderings that we managed to get over.

On account of these quicksands and mud-holes, crossing the creeks on the prairie is often very disagreeable work. Even when apparently perfectly dry, the bottom may have merely a thin crust of hard mud and underneath a fathomless bed of slime. If the grass appears wet, and with here and there a few tussocks of taller blades in it, it is well to avoid it. Often a man may have to go along a creek nearly a mile before he can find a safe crossing, or else run the risk of seeing his horse mired hard and fast. When a horse is once in a mud-hole it will perhaps so exhaust itself by its first desperate and fruitless struggle that it is almost impossible to get it out. Its bridle and saddle have to be taken off; if another horse is along, the lariat is drawn from the pommel of the latter's saddle to the neck of the one that is in, and it is hauled out by main force. Otherwise, a man may have to work half a day fixing the horse's legs in the right position, and then taking it by the forelock and endeavoring to get it to make a plunge, each plunge bringing it perhaps a few inches nearer the firm ground. Quicksands are even more dangerous than these mud-holes, as, if at all deep, a creature that cannot get out immediately is sure to be speedily engulfed. Many parts of the Little Missouri are impassable on account of these quicksands. Always in crossing unknown ground that looks dangerous it is

best to feel your way very cautiously along and, if possible, to find out some cattle trail or even game trail which can be followed.

For some time after leaving the creek nothing was seen; until, on coming over the crest of the next great divide, I came in sight of a band of six or eight prong-horn about a quarter of a mile off to my right hand. There was a slight breeze from the southeast, which blew diagonally across my path towards the antelope. The latter, after staring at me a minute, as I rode slowly on, suddenly started at full speed to run directly up wind, and therefore in a direction that would cut the line of my course less than half a mile ahead of where I was. Knowing that when antelope begin running in a straight line they are very hard to turn, and seeing that they would have to run a longer distance than my horse would to intercept them, I clapped spurs into Manitou, and the game old fellow, a very fleet runner, stretched himself down to the ground and seemed to go almost as fast as the quarry. As I had expected, the latter, when they saw me running, merely straightened themselves out and went on, possibly even faster than before, without changing the line of their flight, keeping right up wind. Both horse and antelope fairly flew over the ground, their courses being at an angle that would certainly bring them together. Two of

the antelope led, by some fifty yards or so, the others, who were all bunched together. Nearer and nearer we came, Manitou, in spite of carrying myself and the pack behind the saddle, gamely holding his own, while the antelope, with outstretched necks, went at an even, regular gait that offered a strong contrast to the springing bounds with which a deer runs. At last the two leading animals crossed the line of my flight ahead of me; when I pulled short up, leaped from Manitou's back, and blazed into the band as they went by not forty yards off, aiming well ahead of a fine buck who was on the side nearest me. An antelope's gait is so even that it offers a good running mark; and as the smoke blew off I saw the buck roll over like a rabbit, with both shoulders broken. I then emptied the Winchester at the rest of the band, breaking one hind leg of a young buck. Hastily cutting the throat of, and opening, the dead buck, I again mounted and started off after the wounded one. But, though only on three legs, it went astonishingly fast, having had a good start; and after following it over a mile I gave up the pursuit, though I had gained a good deal; for the heat was very great, and I did not deem it well to tire the horse at the beginning of the trip. Returning to the carcass, I cut off the hams and strung them beside the saddle; an antelope is so spare that there is very little more meat on the body.

This trick of running in a straight line is another of the antelope's peculiar characteristics which frequently lead it into danger. Although with so much sharper eyes than a deer, antelope are in many ways far stupider animals, more like sheep, and they especially resemble the latter in their habit of following a leader, and in their foolish obstinacy in keeping to a course they have once adopted. If a horseman starts to head off a deer the latter will always turn long before he has come within range, but quite often an antelope will merely increase his speed and try to pass ahead of his foe. Almost always, however, one, if alone, will keep out of gunshot, owing to the speed at which he goes, but if there are several in a band which is well strung out, the leader only cares for his own safety and passes well ahead himself. The others follow like sheep, without turning in the least from the line the first followed, and thus may pass within close range. If the leader bounds into the air, those following will often go through exactly the same motions; and if he turns, the others are very apt to each in succession run up and turn in the same place, unless the whole band are manœuvring together, like a squadron of cavalry under orders, as has already been spoken of.

After securing the buck's hams and head (the latter for the sake of the horns, which were unusually

long and fine), I pushed rapidly on without stopping to hunt, to reach some large creek which should contain both wood and water, for even in summer a fire adds greatly to the comfort and cosiness of a night camp. When the sun had nearly set I went over a divide and came in sight of a creek fulfilling the required conditions. It wound its way through a valley of rich bottom land, cottonwood trees of no great height or size growing in thick groves along its banks, while its bed contained many deep pools of water, some of it fresh and good. I rode into a great bend, with a grove of trees on its right and containing excellent feed. Manitou was loosed, with the lariat round his neck, to feed where he wished until I went to bed, when he was to be taken to a place where the grass was thick and succulent, and tethered out for the night. There was any amount of wood with which a fire was started for cheerfulness, and some of the coals were soon raked off apart to cook over. The horse blanket was spread on the ground, with the oilskin over it as a bed, underneath a spreading cottonwood tree, while the regular blanket served as covering. The metal cup was soon filled with water and simmering over the coals to make tea, while an antelope steak was roasting on a forked stick. It is wonderful how cosy a camp, in clear weather, becomes if there is a good fire and enough to eat, and how

sound the sleep is afterwards in the cool air, with the brilliant stars glimmering through the branches overhead. In the country where I was there was absolutely no danger from Indian horse-thieves, and practically none from white ones, for I felt pretty sure no one was anywhere within a good many miles of me, and none could have seen me come into the valley. Besides, in the cattle country stealing horses is a hazardous profession, as any man who is found engaged in it is at once, and very properly, strung up to the nearest tree, or shot if no trees are handy; so very few people follow it, at least for any length of time, and a man's horses are generally safe.

Near where we had halted for the night-camp was a large prairie-dog town. Prairie-dogs are abundant all over the cattle country; they are in shape like little woodchucks, and are the most noisy and inquisitive animals imaginable. They are never found singly, but always in towns of several hundred inhabitants; and these towns are found in all kinds of places where the country is flat and treeless. Sometimes they will be placed on the bottoms of the creeks or rivers, and again far out on the prairie or among the Bad Lands, a long distance from any water. Indeed, so dry are some of the localities in which they exist, that it is a marvel how they can live at all; yet they seem invariably plump and in good condition.

They are exceedingly destructive to grass, eating away everything round their burrows, and thus each town is always extending at the borders, while the holes in the middle are deserted; in many districts they have become a perfect bane to the cattlemen, for the incoming of man has been the means of causing a great falling off in the ranks of their four-footed foes, and this main check to their increase being gone, they multiply at a rate that threatens to make them a serious pest in the future. They are among the few plains animals that are benefited instead of being injured by the presence of man; and it is most difficult to exterminate them or to keep their number in any way under, as they are prolific to a most extraordinary degree; and the quantity of good feed they destroy is very great, and as they eat up the roots of the grass it is a long time before it grows again. Already in many districts the stockmen are seriously considering the best way in which to take steps against them. Prairie-dogs, wherever they exist are sure to attract attention, all the more so because, unlike most other rodents, they are diurnal and not nocturnal, offering therein a curious case of parallelism to their fellow-denizen of the dry plains, the antelope, which is also a creature loving to be up and stirring in the bright daylight, unlike its relatives, the dusk-loving deer. They are very

noisy, their shrill yelping resounding on all sides whenever a man rides through a town. None go far from their homes, always keeping close enough to be able to skulk into them at once; and as soon as a foe appears they take refuge on the hillocks beside their burrows, yelping continuously, and accompanying each yelp by a spasmodic jerking of the tail and body. When the man comes a little nearer they disappear inside and then thrust their heads out, for they are most inquisitive. Their burrows form one of the chief dangers to riding at full speed over the plains country; hardly any man can do much riding on the prairie for more than a year or two without coming to grief on more than one occasion by his horse putting his foot in a prairie-dog hole. A badger hole is even worse. When a horse gets his foot in such a hole, while going at full speed, he turns a complete somersault, and is lucky if he escape without a broken leg, while I have time and again known the rider to be severely injured. There are other smaller animals whose burrows sometimes cause a horseman to receive a sharp tumble. These are the pocket-gophers, queer creatures, shaped like moles and having the same subterranean habits, but with teeth like a rat's, and great pouches on the outside of their jaws,—whose long, rambling tunnels cover the ground in certain places, though the animals themselves

are very rarely seen; and the little striped gophers and gray gophers, entirely different animals, more like ground squirrels. But the prairie-dog is always the main source of danger to the horseman, as well as of mischief to the cattle-herder.

Around the prairie-dog towns it is always well to keep a lookout for the smaller carnivora, especially coyotes and badgers, as they are very fond of such neighborhoods, and almost always it is also a favorite resort for the larger kinds of hawks, which are so numerous throughout the cattle country. Rattlesnakes are quite plenty, living in the deserted holes, and the latter are also the homes of the little burrowing owls, which will often be seen standing at the opening, ready to run in as quick as any of the prairie-dogs if danger threatens. They have a funny habit of gravely bowing or posturing at the passer-by, and stand up very erect on their legs. With the exception of this species, owls are rare in the cattle country.

A prairie-dog is rather a difficult animal to get, as it stands so close to its burrow that a spasmodic kick, even if at the last gasp, sends the body inside, where it cannot be recovered. The cowboys are always practising at them with their revolvers, and, as they are pretty good shots, mortally wound a good many, but unless the force of the blow fairly knocks the prairie-dog away

from the mouth of the burrow, it almost always manages to escape inside. But a good shot with the rifle can kill any number by lying down quietly and waiting a few minutes until the dogs get a little distance from the mouths of their homes.

Badgers are more commonly found around prairie-dog towns than anywhere else; and they get their chief food by digging up the prairie-dogs and gophers with their strong forearms and long, stout claws. They are not often found wandering away from their homes in the day-time, but if so caught are easily run down and killed. A badger is a most desperate fighter, and an overmatch for a coyote, his hide being very thick and his form so squat and strong that it is hard to break his back or legs, while his sharp teeth grip like a steel trap. A very few seconds allow him to dig a hole in the ground, into which he can back all except his head; and when placed thus, with his rear and flanks protected, he can beat off a dog many times his own size. A young badger one night came up round the ranch-house, and began knawing at some bones that had been left near the door. Hearing the noise one of my men took a lantern and went outside. The glare of the light seemed to make the badger stupid, for after looking at the lantern a few moments, it coolly turned and went on eating the scraps

of flesh on the bones, and was knocked on the head without attempting to escape.

To come back to my trip. Early in the morning I was awakened by the shrill yelping of the prairie-dogs, whose town was near me. The sun had not risen, and the air had the peculiar chill it always takes on toward morning, while little wreaths of light mist rose from the pools. Getting up and loosing Manitou to let him feed round where he wished and slake his thirst, I took the rifle, strolled up the creek valley a short distance, and turned off out on the prairie. Nothing was in sight in the way of game; but overhead a skylark was singing, soaring up above me so high that I could not make out his form in the gray morning light. I listened for some time, and the music never ceased for a moment, coming down clear, sweet, and tender from the air above. Soon the strains of another answered from a little distance off, and the two kept soaring and singing as long as I stayed to listen; and when I walked away I could still hear their notes behind me. In some ways the skylark is the sweetest singer we have; only certain of the thrushes rival it, but though the songs of the latter have perhaps even more melody, they are far from being as uninterrupted and well sustained, being rather a succession of broken bursts of music.

The sun was just appearing when I walked

back to the creek bottom. Coming slowly out of a patch of brushwood, was a doe, going down to drink—her great, sensitive ears thrown forward as she peered anxiously and timidly round. She was very watchful, lifting her head and gazing about between every few mouthfuls. When she had drunk her fill she snatched a hasty mouthful or two of the wet grass, and then cantered back to the edge of the brush, when a little spotted fawn came out and joined her. The two stood together for a few moments, and then walked off into the cover. The little pond at which they had drunk was within fifty yards of my night bed; and it had other tenants in the shape of a mallard duck, with a brood of little ducklings, balls of fuzzy yellow down, that bobbed off into the reeds like little corks as I walked by.

Breaking camp is a simple operation for one man; and but a few minutes after breakfast Manitou and I were off, the embers of the fire having been extinguished with the care that comes to be almost second nature with the cattleman, one of whose chief dreads is the prairie fire, that sometimes robs his stock of such an immense amount of feed. Very little game was seen during the morning, as I rode in an almost straight line over the hot, parched plains, the ground cracked and seamed by the heat, and the dull brown blades bending over as if the sun was too

much even for them. The sweat drenched the horse even when we were walking; and long before noon we halted for rest by a bitter alkaline pool with border so steep and rotten that I had to bring water up to the horse in my hat—having taken some along in a canteen for my own use. But there was a steep bank near, overgrown with young trees, and thus giving good shade; and it was this that induced me to stop. When leaving this halting-place, I spied three figures in the distance, loping towards me; they turned out to be cowboys, who had been out a couple of days looking up a band of strayed ponies, and, as they had exhausted their supply of food, I gave them the antelope hams, trusting to shoot another for my own use.

Nor was I disappointed. After leaving the cowboys I headed the horse towards the more rolling country where the prairies begin to break off into the edges of the Bad Lands. Several bands of antelope were seen, and I tried one unsuccessful stalk, not being able to come within rifle range; but towards evening, when only about a mile from a wooded creek on whose banks I intended to sleep, I came across a solitary buck, just as I was topping the ridge of the last divide. As I was keeping a sharp lookout at the time, I reined in the horse the instant the head of the antelope came in sight, and jumping off crept up

till I could see his whole body, when I dropped on my knee and took steady aim. He was a long way off (three hundred yards by actual pacing), and not having made out exactly what we were he stood still, looking intently in our direction and broadside to us. I held well over his shoulder, and at the report he dropped like a shot, the ball having broken his neck. It was a very good shot; the best I ever made at antelope, of which game, as already said, I have killed but very few individuals. Taking the hams and saddle, I rode on down to the creek and again went into camp among timber. Thus on this trip I was never successful in outwitting antelope on the several occasions when I pitted my craft and skill against their wariness and keen senses, always either failing to get within range or else missing them; but nevertheless I got two by taking advantage of the stupidity and curiosity which they occasionally show.

The middle part of the days having proved so very hot, and as my store of biscuits was nearly gone, and as I knew, moreover, that the antelope meat would not keep over twenty-four hours, I decided to push back home next day; and, accordingly, I broke camp at the first streak of dawn, and took Manitou back to the ranch at a smart lope.

A solitary trip such as this was, through a comparatively wild region in which game is still

plentiful, always has great attraction for any man who cares for sport and for nature, and who is able to be his own companion, but the pleasure after all depends a good deal on the weather. To be sure, after a little experience in roughing it, the hardships seem a good deal less formidable than they formerly did, and a man becomes able to roll up in a wet blanket and sleep all night in a pelting rain without hurting himself—though he will shiver a good deal, and feel pretty numb and stiff in those chill and dreary hours just before dawn. But when a man's clothes and bedding and rifle are all wet, no matter how philosophically he may bear it, it may be taken for granted that he does not enjoy it. So fair weather is a very vital and important element among those that go to make up the pleasure and success of such a trip. Luckily, fair weather can be counted on with a good deal of certainty in late spring and throughout most of the summer and fall on the Northern cattle plains. The storms that do take place, though very violent, do not last long.

Every now and then, however, there will be in the fall a three-days' storm in which it is almost impossible to travel, and then the best thing to be done is to lie up under any shelter that is at hand until it blows over. I remember one such camp which was made in the midst of the most singular and picturesque surroundings. It was

toward the end of a long wagon-trip that we had been taking, and all of the horses were tired by incessant work. We had come through country which was entirely new to us, passing nearly all day in a low flat prairie through which flowed a stream that we supposed to be either the Box Alder or the Little Beaver. In leaving this we had struck some heavy sand-hills, and while pulling the loaded wagon up them one of the team played out completely, and we had to take her out and put in one of the spare saddle-ponies, a tough little fellow. Night came on fast, and the sun was just setting when we crossed the final ridge and came in sight of as singular a bit of country as I have ever seen. The cowboys, as we afterward found, had christened the place "Medicine Buttes." In plains dialect, I may explain, "Medicine" has been adopted from the Indians, among whom it means anything supernatural or very unusual. It is used in the sense of "magic," or "out of the common."

Over an irregular tract of gently rolling sandy hills, perhaps about three quarters of a mile square, were scattered several hundred detached and isolated buttes or cliffs of sandstone, each butte from fifteen to fifty feet high, and from thirty to a couple of hundred feet across. Some of them rose as sharp peaks or ridges, or as connected chains, but much the greater number had

flat tops like little table-lands. The sides were perfectly perpendicular, and were cut and channelled by the weather into most extraordinary forms: caves, columns, battlements, spires, and flying buttresses were mingled in the strangest confusion. Many of the caves were worn clear through the buttes, and they were at every height in the sides, while ledges ran across the faces, and shoulders and columns jutted out from the corners. On the tops and at the bases of most of the cliffs grew pine trees, some of considerable height, and the sand gave everything a clean, white look.

Altogether, it was as fantastically beautiful a place as I have ever seen: it seemed impossible that the hand of man should not have had something to do with its formation. There was a spring of clear cold water a few hundred yards off, with good feed for the horses round it; and we made our camp at the foot of one of the largest buttes, building a roaring pine-log fire in an angle in the face of the cliff, while our beds were under the pine trees. It was the time of the full moon, and the early part of the night was clear. The flame of the fire leaped up the side of the cliff, the red light bringing out into lurid and ghastly relief the bold corners and strange-looking escarpments of the rock, while against it the stiff limbs of the pines stood out like rigid bars of iron. Walking off out of sight of the circle of fire-light, among

the tall crags, the place seemed almost as unreal as if we had been in fairy-land. The flood of clear moonlight turned the white faces of the cliffs and the grounds between them into shining silver, against which the pines showed dark and sombre, while the intensely black shadows of the buttes took on forms that were grimly fantastic. Every cave or cranny in the crags looked so black that it seemed almost to be thrown out from the surface, and when the branches of the trees moved, the bright moonlight danced on the ground as if it were a sheet of molten metal. Neither in shape nor in color did our surroundings seem to belong to the dull gray world through which we had been travelling all day.

But by next morning everything had changed. A furious gale of wind was blowing, and we were shrouded in a dense, drizzling mist, through which at times the rain drove in level sheets. Now and then the fog would blow away, and then would come on thicker than ever, and when it began to clear off a steady rain took its place, and the wind increased to a regular hurricane. With its canvas top on, the wagon would certainly have been blown over if on open ground, and it was impossible to start or keep a fire except under the sheltered lee of the cliff. Moreover, the wind kept shifting, and we had to shift too as fast as ever it started to blow from a new

quarter; and thus in the course of the twenty-four hours we made a complete circle of the cliff at whose base we were. Our blankets got wet during the night; and they got no drier during the day; and the second night, as we slept on them they got steadily damper. Our provisions were pretty nearly out, and so, with little to eat and less to do, wet and uncomfortable, we cowered over the sputtering fire, and whiled the long day away as best we might with our own thoughts; fortunately, we had all learned that no matter how bad things are, grumbling and bad temper can always be depended upon to make them worse, and so bore our ill-fortune, if not with stoical indifference, at least in perfect quiet. Next day the storm still continued, but the fog was gone and the wind somewhat easier; we spent the whole day looking up the horses, which had drifted a long distance before the storm; nor was it till the morning of the third day that we left our beautiful but, as events had made it, uncomfortable camping-ground.

In midsummer the storms are rarely of long duration, but are very severe while they last. I remember well one day when I was caught in such a storm. I had gone some twenty-five miles from the ranch to see the round-up, which had reached what is known as the Oxbow of the Little Missouri, where the river makes a great

loop round a flat grassy bottom, on which the cattle herd was gathered. I stayed, seeing the cattle cut out and the calves branded, until after dinner; for it was at the time of the year when the days were longest.

At last the work was ended, and I started home in the twilight. The horse splashed across the shallow ford, and then spent half an hour in climbing up through the rugged side hills, till we reached the top of the first great plateau that had to be crossed. As soon as I got on it I put in the spurs and started off at a gallop. In the dusk the brown level land stretched out in formless expanse ahead of me, unrelieved, except by the bleached white of a buffalo's skull, whose outlines glimmered indistinctly to one side of the course I was riding. On my left the sun had set behind a row of jagged buttes, that loomed up in sharp relief against the western sky; above them it had left a bar of yellow light, which only made more intense the darkness of the surrounding heavens. In the quarter towards which I was heading there had gathered a lowering mass of black storm-clouds, lit up by the incessant play of the lightning. The wind had totally died away, and the death-like stillness was only broken by the continuous, measured beat of the horse's hoofs as he galloped over the plain, and at times the muttered roll of the distant thunder.

Without slacking pace, I crossed the plateau, and as I came to the other edge the storm burst in sheets and torrents of water. In five minutes I was drenched through, and to guide myself had to take advantage of the continual flashes of lightning; and I was right glad, half an hour afterward, to stop and take shelter in the log hut of a couple of cowboys, where I could get dry and warm.

## CHAPTER II

### A TRIP AFTER MOUNTAIN SHEEP

LATE one fall a spell of bitter weather set in, and lasted on through the early part of the winter. For many days together the cold was fierce in its intensity; and the wheels of the ranch-wagon, when we drove out for a load of firewood, creaked and sang as they ground through the powdery snow that lay light on the ground. At night in the clear sky the stars seemed to snap and glitter; and for weeks of cloudless white weather the sun shone down on a land from which his beams glanced and glistened as if it had been the surface of a mirror, till the glare hurt the eyes that looked upon it. In the still nights we could hear the trees crack and jar from the strain of the biting frost; and in its winding bed the river lay fixed like a huge bent bar of blue steel.

We had been told that a small band of big-horn was hanging around some very steep and broken country about twenty-five miles from the ranch-house. I had been out after them once alone, but had failed to find even their tracks, and had made up my mind that in order to hunt them it would

be necessary to make a three- or four-days' trip, taking along the buckboard with our bedding and eatables. The trip had been delayed owing to two of my men, who had been sent out to buy ponies, coming in with a bunch of fifty, for the most part hardly broken. Some of them were meant for the use of the lower ranch, and the men from the latter had come up to get them. At night the ponies were let loose, and each day were gathered into the horse-corral and broken as well as we could break them in such weather. It was my intention not to start on the hunt until the ponies were separated into the two bands, and the men from the lower ranch (the Elkhorn) had gone off with theirs. Then one of the cowboys was to take the buckboard up to a deserted hunter's hut, which lay on a great bend of the river near by the ground over which the big-horn were said to wander, while my foreman, Merrifield, and myself would take saddle-horses, and each day ride to the country through which we intended to hunt, returning at night to the buckboard and hut. But we started a little sooner than we intended, owing to a funny mistake made by one of the cowboys.

The sun did not rise until nearly eight, but each morning we breakfasted at five, and the men were then sent out on the horses which had been kept in over night, to find and drive home the

pony band; of course, they started in perfect darkness, except for the starlight. On the last day of our proposed stay the men had come in with the ponies before sunrise; and, leaving the latter in the corral, they entered the house and crowded round the fire, stamping and beating their numbed hands together. In the midst of the confusion word was brought by one of the cowboys, that while hunting for the horses he had seen two bears go down into a wash-out; and he told us that he could bring us right to the place where he had seen them, for as soon as he left it he had come in at speed on his swift, iron-gray horse—a vicious, clean-limbed devil, with muscles like bundles of tense wire; the cold had made the brute savage, and it had been punished with the cruel curb-bit until long, bloody icicles hung from its lips.

At once Merrifield and I mounted in hot haste and rode off with the bringer of good tidings, leaving hasty instructions where we were to be joined by the buckboard. The sun was still just below the horizon as we started, wrapped warmly in our fur coats and with our caps drawn down over our ears to keep out the cold. The cattle were standing in the thickets and sheltered ravines, huddled together with their heads down, the frost lying on their backs and the icicles hanging from their muzzles; they stared at us as

we rode along, but were too cold to move a hair's breadth out of our way; indeed, it is a marvel how they survive the winter at all. Our course at first lay up a long valley, cut up by cattle trails; then we came out, just as the sun had risen, upon the rounded, gently-sloping highlands, thickly clad with the short, nutritious grass, which curls on the stalk into good hay, and on which the cattle feed during the winter. We galloped rapidly over the hills, our blood gradually warming up from the motion; and soon came to the long wash-out, cutting down like a miniature canyon for a space of two or three miles through the bottom of a valley, into which the cowboy said he had seen the bears go. One of us took one side and one the other, and we rode along up wind, but neither the bears nor any traces of them could we see; at last, half a mile ahead of us, two dark objects suddenly emerged from the wash-out, and came out on the plain. For a second we thought they were the quarry; then we saw that they were merely a couple of dark-colored ponies. The cowboy's chapfallen face was a study; he had seen, in the dim light, the two ponies going down with their heads held near the ground, and had mistaken them for bears (by no means, the unnatural mistake that it seems; I have known an experienced hunter fire twice at a black calf in the late evening, thinking it

was a bear). He knew only too well the merciless chaff to which he would be henceforth exposed; and a foretaste of which he at once received from my companion. The ponies had strayed from the main herd, and the cowboy was sent to drive them to the home corral, while Merrifield and myself continued our hunt.

We had all day before us, and but twenty miles or so to cover before reaching the hut where the buckboard was to meet us; but the course we intended to take was through country so rough that no Eastern horse could cross it, and even the hardy Western hunting-ponies, who climb like goats, would have difficulty in keeping their feet. Our route lay through the heart of the Bad Lands, but of course the country was not equally rough in all parts. There were tracts of varying size each covered with a tangled mass of chains and peaks, the buttes in places reaching a height that would in the East entitle them to be called mountains. Every such tract was riven in all directions by deep chasms and narrow ravines, whose sides sometimes rolled off in gentle slopes, but far more often rose as sheer cliffs, with narrow ledges along their fronts. A sparse growth of grass covered certain portions of these lands, and on some of the steep hillsides, or in the canyons, were scanty groves of coniferous evergreens, so stunted by the thin soil and bleak weather that

many of them were bushes rather than trees. Most of the peaks and ridges, and many of the valleys, were entirely bare of vegetation, and these had been cut by wind and water into the strangest and most fantastic shapes. Indeed, it is difficult, in looking at such formations, to get rid of the feeling that their curiously twisted and contorted forms are due to some vast volcanic upheavals or other subterranean forces; yet they are merely caused by the action of the various weathering forces of the dry climate on the different strata of sandstones, clays, and marls. Isolated columns shoot up into the air, bearing on their summits flat rocks like tables; square buttes tower high above surrounding depressions, which are so cut up by twisting gullies and low ridges as to be almost impassable; shelving masses of sandstone jut out over the sides of the cliffs; some of the ridges, with perfectly perpendicular sides, are so worn away that they stand up like gigantic knife-blades; and gulches, washouts, and canyons dig out the sides of each butte, while between them are thrust out long spurs, with sharp, ragged tops. All such patches of barren, broken ground, where the feed seems too scant to support any large animal, are the favorite haunts of the big-horn, though it also wanders far into the somewhat gentler and more fertile, but still very rugged, domain of the black-tail deer.

Between all such masses of rough country lay wide, grassy plateaus or long stretches of bare plain, covered with pebbly shingle. We loped across all these open places; and when we came to a reach of broken country would leave our horses and hunt through it on foot. Except where the wind had blown it off, there was a thin coat of snow over everything, and the icy edges and sides of the cliffs gave only slippery and uncertain foothold, so as to render the climbing doubly toilsome. Hunting the big-horn is at all times the hardest and most difficult kind of sport, and is equally trying to both wind and muscle; and for that very reason the big-horn ranks highest among all the species of game that are killed by still-hunting, and its chase constitutes the noblest form of sport with the rifle, always excepting, of course, those kinds of hunting where the quarry is itself dangerous to attack. Climbing kept us warm in spite of the bitter weather; we only wore our fur coats and shaps while on horseback, leaving them where we left the horses, and doing our still-hunting in buckskin shirts, fur caps, and stout shoes.

Big-horn, more commonly known as mountain sheep, are extremely wary and cautious animals, and are plentiful in but few places. This is rather surprising, for they seem to be fairly prolific (although not as much so as deer and antelope), and

comparatively few are killed by the hunters; indeed, many less are shot than of any other kind of Western game, in proportion to their numbers. They hold out in a place long after the elk and buffalo have been exterminated, and for many years after both of these have become things of the past the big-horn will still exist to afford sport to the man who is a hardy mountaineer and skilful with the rifle. For it is the only kind of game on whose haunts cattle do not trespass. Good buffalo or elk pasture is sure to be also good pasture for steers and cows; and in summer the herds of the ranchman wander far into the prairies of the antelope, while in winter their chosen and favorite resorts are those of which the black-tail is equally fond. Thus, the cattlemen are almost as much foes of these kinds of game as are the hunters, but neither cattle nor cowboys penetrate into the sterile and rocky wastes where the big-horn is found. And it is too wary game, and the labor of following it is too great, for it ever to be much persecuted by the skin or market hunters.

In size, the big-horn comes next to buffalo and elk, averaging larger than the black-tail deer, while an old ram will sometimes be almost as heavy as a small cow elk. In his movements he is not light and graceful like the prong-horn and other antelopes, his marvellous agility seeming

rather to proceed from sturdy strength and wonderful command over iron sinews and muscles. The huge horns are carried proudly erect by the massive neck; every motion of the body is made with perfect poise; and there seems to be no ground so difficult that the big-horn cannot cross it. There is probably no animal in the world his superior in climbing; and his only equals are the other species of mountain sheep and the ibexes. No matter how sheer the cliff, if there are ever so tiny cracks or breaks in the surface, the big-horn will bound up or down it with wonderful ease and seeming absence of effort. The perpendicular bounds it can make are truly startling—in strong contrast with its distant relative the prong-horn, which can leap almost any level jump but seems unable to clear the smallest height. In descending a sheer wall of rock the big-horn holds all four feet together and goes down in long jumps, bounding off the surface almost like a rubber ball every time he strikes it. The way that one will vanish over the roughest and most broken ground is a perpetual surprise to any one who has hunted them; and the ewes are quite as skilful as the rams, while even the very young lambs seem almost as well able to climb, and certainly follow wherever their elders lead. Time and again one will rush over a cliff to what appears certain death, and will gallop away from the

bottom unharmed. Their perfect self-confidence seems to be justified, however, for they never slip or make a misstep, even in the narrowest ledges when covered with ice and snow. And all their marvellous jumping and climbing is done with an apparent ease that renders it the more wonderful. Rapid though the movements of one are, they are made without any of the nervous hurry so characteristic of the antelopes and smaller deer; the onlooker is really as much impressed with the animal's sinewy power and self-command as with his agility. His strength and his self-reliance seem to fit him above all other kinds of game to battle with the elements and with his brute foes; he does not care to have the rough ways of his life made smooth; were his choice free, his abode would still be the vast and lonely wilderness in which he is found. To him the barren wastes of the Bad Lands offer a most attractive home; yet to other living creatures they are at all times as grimly desolate and forbidding as any spot on earth can be; at all seasons they seem hostile to every form of life. In the raging heat of summer the dry earth cracks and crumbles, and the sultry, lifeless air sways and trembles as if above a furnace. Through the high, clear atmosphere, the intense sun-light casts unnaturally deep shadows; and where there are no shadows, brings out in glaring relief the weird,

fantastic shapes and bizarre coloring of the buttes. In winter, snow and ice coat the thin crests and sharp sides of the cliffs, and increase their look of savage wildness; the cold turns the ground into ringing iron; and the icy blasts sweep through the clefts and over the ridges with an angry fury even more terrible than is the intense, death-like, silent heat of midsummer. But the mountain ram is alike proudly indifferent to the hottest summer sun and to the wildest winter storm.

The lambs are brought forth late in May or early in June. Like the antelope, the dam soon leads her kids to join the herd, which may range in size from a dozen to four or five times as many individuals, generally approaching nearer the former number. The ewes, lambs, and yearling or two-year-old rams go together. The young but full-grown rams keep in small parties of three or four, while the old fellows, with monstrous heads, keep by themselves, except when they join the ewes in the rutting season. At this time they wage savage war with each other. The horns of the old rams are always battered and scarred from these butting contests—which appearance, by the way, has given rise to the ridiculous idea that they were in the habit of jumping over precipices and landing on their heads.

Occasionally, the big-horn come down into the valleys or along the grassy slopes to feed, but this

is not often, and in such cases every member of the band is always keeping the sharpest lookout, and at the slightest alarm they beat a retreat to their broken fastnesses. At night-time or in the early morning they come down to drink at the small pools or springs, but move off the instant they have satisfied their thirst. As a rule, they spend their time among the rocks and rough ground, and it is in these places that they must be hunted. They cover a good deal of ground when feeding, for the feed is scanty in their haunts, and they walk quite rapidly along the ledges or peaks, by preference high up, as they graze or browse. When through feeding they always choose as a resting-place some point from which they can command a view over all the surrounding territory. An old ram is peculiarly wary. The crest of a ridge or the top of a peak is a favorite resting-bed; but even more often they choose some ledge, high up, but just below the crest, or lie on a shelf of rock that juts out from where a ridge ends, and thus enables them to view the country on three sides of them. In color, they harmonize curiously with the grayish or yellowish brown of the ground on which they are found, and it is often very difficult to make them out when lying motionless on a ledge of rock. Time and again they will be mistaken for boulders, and, on the other hand, I have more

than once stalked up to masses of sandstone that I have mistaken for sheep.

When lying down, the big-horn can thus scan everything below it; and both while feeding and resting it invariably keeps the sharpest possible lookout for all danger from beneath, and this trait makes it needful for the hunter to always keep on the highest ground and try to come on it from above. For protection against danger it relies on ears, eyes, and nose alike. The slightest sound startles it and puts it on its guard, while if it sees or smells anything which it deems may bode danger it is off like a flash. It is as wary and quick-sighted as the antelope, and its senses are as keen as are those of the elk, while it is not afflicted by the occasional stupidity nor heedless recklessness of these two animals, nor by the intense curiosity of the black-tail, and it has all the white-tail's sound common-sense, coupled with a much shyer nature and much sharper faculties, so that it is more difficult to kill than are any of these creatures. And the climbing is rendered all the more tiresome by the traits above spoken of, which make it necessary for the hunter to keep above it. The first thing to do is to clamber up to the top of a ridge, and after that to keep on the highest crests.

At all times, and with all game, the still-hunter should be quiet, and should observe caution, but

when after mountain sheep he must be absolutely noiseless and must not neglect a single chance. He must be careful not to step on a loose stone or to start any crumbling earth; he must always hunt up or across wind, and he must take advantage of every crag or boulder to shelter himself from the gaze of his watchful quarry. While keeping up as high as possible, he should not go on the very summit, as that brings him out in too sharp relief against the sky. And all the while he will be crossing land where he will need to pay good heed to his own footing or else run the risk of breaking his neck.

As far as lay in us, on our first day's hunt we paid proper heed to all the rules of hunting-craft; but without success. Up the slippery, ice-covered buttes we clambered, clinging to the rocks, and slowly working our way across the faces of the cliffs, or cautiously creeping along the narrow ledges, peering over every crest long and carefully, and from the peaks scanning the ground all about with the field-glasses. But we saw no sheep, and but little sign of them. Still we did see some sign, and lost a shot, either through bad luck or bad management. This was while going through a cluster of broken buttes, whose peaks rose up like sharp cones. On reaching the top of one at the leeward end, we worked cautiously up the side, seeing nothing, to the other end, and

then down along the middle. When about halfway back we came across the fresh footprints of a ewe or yearling ram in a little patch of snow. On tracing them back we found that it had been lying down on the other side of a small bluff, within a hundred yards of where we had passed, and must have either got our wind, or else have heard us make some noise. At any rate, it had gone off, and though we followed its tracks a little in the snow, they soon got on the bare, frozen ground and we lost them.

After that we saw nothing. The cold, as the day wore on, seemed gradually to chill us through and through; our hands and feet became numb and our ears tingled under our fur caps. We hunted carefully through two or three masses of jagged buttes which seemed most likely places for the game we were after, taking a couple of hours to each place; and then, as the afternoon was beginning to wane, mounted our shivering horses for good, and pushed toward the bend of the river where we were to meet the buckboard. Our course lay across a succession of bleak, windswept plateaus, broken by deep and narrow pine-clad gorges. We galloped swiftly over the plateaus, where the footing was good and the going easy, for the gales had driven the feathery snow off the withered brown grass; but getting on and off these table-lands was often a real labor,

their sides were so sheer. The horses plunged and scrambled after us as we led them up; while in descending they would sit back on their haunches and half-walk, half-slide, down the steep inclines. Indeed, one or two of the latter were so very straight that the horses would not face them, and we had to turn them round and back them over the edge, and then all go down with a rush. At any rate it warmed our blood to keep out of the way of the hoofs. On one of the plateaus I got a very long shot at a black-tail, which I missed.

Finally, we struck the head of a long, winding valley with a smooth bottom, and after cantering down it four or five miles, came to the river, just after the cold, pale-red sun had sunk behind the line of hills ahead of us. Our horses were sharp shod, and crossed the ice without difficulty; and in a groove of leafless cottonwoods, on the opposite side, we found the hut for which we had been making, the cowboy already inside with the fire started. Throughout the night the temperature sank lower and lower, and it was impossible to keep the crazy old hut anywhere near freezing-point; the wind whistled through the chinks and crannies of the logs, and, after a short and by no means elaborate supper, we were glad to cower down with our great fur coats still on, under the pile of buffalo-robes and bearskins. My sleeping-

bag came in very handily, and kept me as warm as possible, in spite of the bitter frost.

We were up and had taken breakfast next morning by the time the first streak of dawn had dimmed the brilliancy of the stars, and immediately afterwards strode off on foot, as we had been hampered by the horses on the day before. We walked briskly across the plain until, by the time it was light enough to see to shoot, we came to the foot of a great hill, known as Middle Butte, a huge, isolated mass of rock, several miles in length, and with high sides, very steep towards the nearly level summit; it would be deemed a mountain of no inconsiderable size in the East. We hunted carefully through the outlying foothills and projecting spurs around its base, without result, finding but a few tracks, and those very old ones, and then toiled up to the top, which, though narrow in parts, in others widened out into plateaus half a mile square. Having made a complete circuit of the top, peering over the edge and closely examining the flanks of the butte with the field-glass, without having seen anything, we slid down the other side and took off through a streak of very rugged but low country. This day, though the weather had grown even colder, we did not feel it, for we walked all the while with a quick pace, and the climbing was very hard work. The shoulders and

ledges of the cliffs had become round and slippery with the ice, and it was no easy task to move up and along them, clutching the gun in one hand, and grasping each little projection with the other. Climbing through the Bad Lands is just like any other kind of mountaineering, except that the precipices and chasms are much lower; but this really makes very little difference when the ground is frozen as solid as iron, for it would be almost as unpleasant to fall fifty feet as to fall two hundred, and the result to the person who tried it would be very much the same in each case.

Hunting for a day or two without finding game where the work is severe and toilsome, is a good test of the sportsman's staying qualities; the man who at the end of the time is proceeding with as much caution and determination as at the beginning, has got the right stuff in him. On this day I got rather tired, and committed one of the blunders of which no hunter ought ever to be guilty; that is, I fired at small game while on ground where I might expect large. We had seen two or three jack-rabbits scudding off like noiseless white shadows, and finally came upon some sharp-tail prairie-fowl in a hollow. One was quite near me, perched on a bush, and with its neck stretched up offered a beautiful mark; I could not resist it, so knelt and fired. At the report of the rifle (it was a miss, by-the-by) a

head suddenly appeared over a ridge some six hundred yards in front,—too far off for us to make out what kind of animal it belonged to,—looked fixedly at us, and then disappeared. We feared it might be a mountain sheep, and that my unlucky shot had deprived us of the chance of a try at it; but on hurrying up to the place where it had been we were relieved to find that the tracks were only those of a black-tail. After this lesson we proceeded in silence, making a long circle through the roughest kind of country. When on the way back to camp, where the buttes rose highest and steepest, we came upon fresh tracks, but as it was then late in the afternoon, did not try to follow them that day. When near the hut I killed a sharp-tail for supper, making rather a neat shot, the bird being eighty yards off. The night was even colder than the preceding one, and all signs told us that we would soon have a change for the worse in the weather, which made me doubly anxious to get a sheep before the storm struck us. We determined that next morning we would take the horses and make a quick push for the chain of high buttes where we had seen the fresh tracks, and hunt them through with thorough care.

We started in the cold gray of the next morning and pricked rapidly off over the frozen plain, columns of white steam rising from the nostrils of

the galloping horses. When we reached the foot of the hills where we intended to hunt, and had tethered the horses, the sun had already risen, but it was evident that the clear weather of a fortnight past was over. The air was thick and hazy, and away off in the northwest a towering mass of grayish white clouds looked like a weather-breeder; everything boded a storm at no distant date. The country over which we now hunted was wilder and more mountainous than any we had yet struck. High, sharp peaks and ridges broke off abruptly into narrow gorges and deep ravines; they were bare of all but the scantiest vegetation, save on some of the sheltered sides where grew groves of dark pines, now laden down with feathery snow. The climbing was as hard as ever. At first we went straight up the side of the tallest peak, and then along the knife-like ridge which joined it with the next. The ice made the footing very slippery as we stepped along the ledges or crawled round the jutting shoulders, and we had to look carefully for our footholds; while in the cold, thin air every quick burst we made up a steep hill caused us to pant for breath. We had gone but a little way before we saw fresh signs of the animals we were after, but it was some time before we came upon the quarry itself.

We left the high ground and, descending into a narrow chasm, walked along its bottom, which

was but a couple of feet wide, while the sides rose up from it at an acute angle. After following this for a few hundred yards, we turned a sharp corner, and shortly afterward our eyes were caught by some grains of fresh earth lying on the snow in front of our feet. On the sides, some feet above our heads, were marks in the snow which a moment's glance showed us had been made by a couple of mountain sheep that had come down one side of the gorge and had leaped across to the other, their sharp toes going through the thin snow and displacing the earth that had fallen to the bottom. The tracks had evidently been made just before we rounded the corner, and as we had been advancing noiselessly on the snow, with the wind in our favor, we knew that the animals could have no suspicion of our presence. They had gone up the cliff on our right, but as that on our left was much lower, and continued for some distance parallel to the other, we concluded that by running along its top we would be most certain to get a good shot. Clambering instantly up the steep side, digging my hands and feet into the loose snow, and grasping at every little rock or frozen projection, I reached the top; and then ran forward along the ridge a few paces, crouching behind the masses of queerly-shaped sandstone; and saw, about ninety yards off across the ravine, a couple of mountain rams. The one with

the largest horns was broadside toward me, his sturdy massive form outlined clearly against the sky, as he stood on the crest of the ridge. I dropped on my knee, raising the rifle as I did so; for a second he did not quite make me out, turning his head half round to look. I held the sight fairly on the point just behind his shoulder and pulled the trigger. At the report he staggered and pitched forward, but recovered himself and crossed over the ridge out of sight. We jumped and slid down into the ravine again, and clambered up the opposite side as fast as our lungs and the slippery ice would let us; then taking the trail of the wounded ram we trotted along it. We had not far to go; for, as I expected, we found him lying on his side a couple of hundred yards beyond the ridge, his eyes already glazed in death. The bullet had gone in behind the shoulder and ranged clean through his body crosswise, going a little forward; no animal less tough than a mountain ram could have gone any distance at all with such a wound. He had most obligingly run round to a part of the hill where we could bring up one of the horses without very much difficulty. Accordingly, I brought up old Manitou, who can carry anything and has no fear, and the bighorn was soon strapped across his back. It was a fine ram, with perfectly-shaped but not very large horns.

The other ram, two years old, with small horns, had bounded over the bridge before I could get a shot at him; we followed his trail for half a mile, but as he showed no signs of halting, and we were anxious to get home, we then gave up the pursuit.

It was still early in the day, and we made up our minds to push back for the home ranch, as we did not wish to be caught out in a long storm. The lowering sky was already overcast by a mass of leaden-gray clouds; and it was evident that we had no time to lose. In a little over an hour we were back at the log camp, where the ram was shifted from Manitou's back to the buck-board. A very few minutes sufficed to pack up our bedding and provisions, and we started home. Merrifield and I rode on ahead, not sparing the horses; but before we got home the storm had burst, and a furious blizzard blew in our teeth as we galloped along the last mile of the river bottom, before coming to the home ranch-house; and as we warmed our stiffened limbs before the log fire, I congratulated myself upon the successful outcome of what I knew would be the last hunting-trip I should take during that season.

The death of this ram was accomplished without calling for any very good shooting on our part. He was standing still, less than a hundred yards off, when the shot was fired; and we came across him so close merely by accident. Still, we fairly

deserved our luck, for we had hunted with the most patient and painstaking care from dawn till nightfall for the better part of three days, spending most of the time in climbing at a smart rate of speed up sheer cliffs and over rough and slippery ground. Still-hunting the big-horn is always a toilsome and laborious task, and the very bitter weather during which we had been out had not lessened the difficulty of the work, though in the cold it was much less exhausting than it would have been to have hunted across the same ground in summer. No other kind of hunting does as much to bring out the good qualities, both moral and physical, of the sportsmen who follow it. If a man keeps at it, it is bound to make him both hardy and resolute; to strengthen his muscles and fill out his lungs.

Mountain mutton is in the fall the most delicious eating furnished by any game animal. Nothing else compares with it for juiciness, tenderness, and flavor; but at all other times of the year it is tough, stringy, and worthless.

## CHAPTER III

### THE LORDLY BUFFALO

GONE forever are the mighty herds of the lordly buffalo. A few solitary individuals and small bands are still to be found scattered here and there in the wilder parts of the plains; and, though most of these will be very soon destroyed, others will for some years fight off their doom and lead a precarious existence either in remote and almost desert portions of the country near the Mexican frontier, or else in the wildest and most inaccessible fastnesses of the Rocky Mountains; but the great herds, that for the first three quarters of this century formed the distinguishing and characteristic feature of the Western plains, have vanished forever.

It is only about a hundred years ago that the white man, in his march westward, first encroached upon the lands of the buffalo, for these animals had never penetrated in any number to the Appalachian chain of mountains. Indeed, it was after the beginning of the century before the inroads of the whites upon them grew at all serious. Then, though constantly driven westward,

the diminution in their territory, if sure, was at least slow, although growing progressively more rapid. Less than a score of years ago the great herds, containing many millions of individuals, ranged over a vast expanse of country that stretched in an unbroken line from near Mexico to far into British America; in fact, over almost all the plains that are now known as the cattle region. But since that time their destruction has gone on with appalling rapidity and thoroughness; and the main factors in bringing it about have been the railroads, which carried hordes of hunters into the land and gave them means to transport their spoils to market. Not quite twenty years since, the range was broken in two, and the buffalo herds in the middle slaughtered or thrust aside; and thus there resulted two ranges, the northern and the southern. The latter was the larger, but being more open to the hunters, was the sooner to be depopulated; and the last of the great southern herds was destroyed in 1878, though scattered bands escaped and wandered into the desolate wastes to the southwest. Meanwhile, equally savage war was waged on the northern herds, and five years later the last of these was also destroyed or broken up. The bulk of this slaughter was done in the dozen years from 1872 to 1883; never before in all history were so many large wild ani-

mals of one species slain in so short a space of time.

The extermination of the buffalo has been a veritable tragedy of the animal world. Other races of animals have been destroyed within historic times, but these have been species of small size, local distribution, and limited numbers, usually found in some particular island or group of islands; while the huge buffalo, in countless myriads, ranged over the greater part of a continent. Its nearest relative, the Old World aurochs, formerly found all through the forests of Europe, is almost as near the verge of extinction, but with the latter the process has been slow, and has extended over a period of a thousand years, instead of being compressed into a dozen. The destruction of the various larger species of South African game is much more local, and is proceeding at a much slower rate. It may truthfully be said that the sudden and complete extermination of the vast herds of the buffalo is without a parallel in historic times.

No sight is more common on the plains than that of a bleached buffalo skull; and their countless numbers attest the abundance of the animal at a time not so very long past. On those portions where the herds made their last stand, the carcasses, dried in the clear, high air, or the mouldering skeletons, abound. Last year, in

crossing the country around the heads of the Big Sandy, O'Fallon Creek, Little Beaver, and Box Alder, these skeletons or dried carcasses were in sight from every hillock, often lying over the ground so thickly that several score could be seen at once. A ranchman who at the same time had made a journey of a thousand miles across Northern Montana, along the Milk River, told me that, to use his own expression, during the whole distance he was never out of sight of a dead buffalo, and never in sight of a live one.

Thus, though gone, the traces of the buffalo are still thick over the land. Their dried dung is found everywhere, and is in many places the only fuel afforded by the plains; their skulls, which last longer than any other part of the animal, are among the most familiar of objects to the plainsman; their bones are in many districts so plentiful that it has become a regular industry, followed by hundreds of men (christened "bone hunters" by the frontiersmen), to go out with wagons and collect them in great numbers for the sake of the phosphates they yield; and Bad Lands, plateaus and prairies alike, are cut up in all directions by the deep ruts which were formerly buffalo trails.

These buffalo trails were made by the herds travelling strung out in single file, and invariably taking the same route each time they passed

over the same piece of ground. As a consequence, many of the ruts are worn so deeply into the ground that a horseman riding along one strikes his stirrups on the earth. In moving through very broken country they are often good guides; for though buffalo can go easily over the roughest places, they prefer to travel where it is smooth, and have a remarkable knack at finding out the best passage down a steep ravine, over a broken cliff, or along a divide. In a pass, or, as it is called in the West, "draw," between two feeding grounds, through which the buffalo were fond of going, fifteen or twenty deep trails may be seen; and often, where the great beasts have travelled in parallel files, two ruts will run side by side over the prairie for a mile's length. These old trails are frequently used by the cattle herds at the present time, or are even turned into pony paths by the ranchmen. For many long years after the buffalo die out from a place, their white skulls and well-worn roads remain as melancholy monuments of their former existence.

The rapid and complete extermination of the buffalo affords an excellent instance of how a race, that has thriven and multiplied for ages under conditions of life to which it has slowly fitted itself by a process of natural selection continued for countless generations, may succumb at once when these surrounding conditions are varied by

the introduction of one or more new elements, immediately becoming the chief forces with which it has to contend in the struggle for life. The most striking characteristics of the buffalo, and those which had been found most useful in maintaining the species until the white man entered upon the scene, were its phenomenal gregariousness,—surpassed by no other four-footed beast, and only equalled, if equalled at all, by one or two kinds of South African antelope,—its massive bulk, and unwieldy strength. The fact that it was a plains and not a forest or mountain animal was at that time also greatly in its favor. Its toughness and hardy endurance fitted it to contend with purely natural forces: to resist cold and the winter blasts, or the heat of a thirsty summer, to wander away to new pastures when the feed on the old was exhausted, to plunge over the broken ground, and to plough its way through snow-drifts or quagmires. But one beast of prey existed sufficiently powerful to conquer it when full grown and in health; and this, the grizzly bear, could only be considered an occasional foe. The Indians were its most dangerous enemies, but they were without horses, and their weapons, bows and arrows, were only available at close range; so that a slight degree of speed enabled a buffalo to get out of the way of their human foes when discovered, and on the open

plains a moderate development of the senses was sufficient to warn them of the approach of the latter before they had come up to the very close distance required for their primitive weapons to take effect. Thus the strength, size, and gregarious habits of the brute were sufficient for a protection against most foes; and a slight degree of speed and moderate development of the senses served as adequate guards against the grizzlies and bow-bearing foot Indians. Concealment, and the habit of seeking lonely and remote places for a dwelling, would have been of no service.

But the introduction of the horse, and shortly afterwards the incoming of white hunters carrying long-range rifles, changed all this. The buffaloes' gregarious habits simply rendered them certain to be seen, and made it a matter of perfect ease to follow them up; their keeping to the open plains heightened their conspicuousness, while their senses were too dull to discover their foes at such a distance as to nullify the effects of the long rifles; their speed was not such as to enable them to flee from a horseman; and their size and strength merely made them too clumsy either to escape from or to contend with their foes. Add to this the fact that their hides and flesh were valuable, and it is small wonder that, under the new order of things, they should have vanished with such rapidity.

The incoming of the cattlemen was another

cause of the completeness of their destruction. Wherever there is good feed for a buffalo, there is good feed for a steer or cow; and so the latter have penetrated into all the pastures of the former; and of course the cowboys follow. A cowboy is not able to kill a deer or antelope unless in exceptional cases, for they are too fleet, too shy, or keep themselves too well hidden. But a buffalo neither tries nor is able to do much in the way of hiding itself; its senses are too dull to give it warning in time; and it is not so swift as a horse, so that a cowboy, riding round in the places where cattle, and therefore buffalo, are likely to be, is pretty sure to see any of the latter that may be about, and then can easily approach near enough to be able to overtake them when they begin running. The size and value of the animal makes the chase after it very keen. Hunters will follow the trail of a band for days, when they would not follow that of deer or antelope for a half-hour.

Events have developed a race of this species, known either as the wood or mountain buffalo, which is acquiring, and has already largely acquired, habits widely different from those of the others of its kind. It is found in the wooded and most precipitous portions of the mountains, instead of on the level and open plains; it goes singly or in small parties, instead of in huge herds; and it is more agile and infinitely more wary than

is its prairie cousin. The formation of this race is due solely to the extremely severe process of natural selection that has been going on among the buffalo herds for the last sixty or seventy years; the vast majority of the individuals were utterly unable to accommodate themselves to the sudden and complete change in the surrounding forces with which they had to cope, and therefore died out; while a very few of the more active and wary, and of those most given to wandering off into mountainous and out-of-the-way places, in each generation survived, and among these the wariness continually increased, partly by personal experience, and still more by inheriting an increasingly suspicious nature from their ancestors. The sense of smell always was excellent in the buffalo; the sense of hearing becomes much quicker in any woods animal than it is in one found on the plains; while in beasts of the forest the eyesight does not have to be as keen as is necessary for their protection in open country. On the mountains the hair grows longer and denser, and the form rather more thickset. As a result, a new race has been built up; and we have an animal far better fitted to "harmonize with the environment," to use the scientific cant of the day. Unfortunately, this race has developed too late. With the settlement of the country it will also disappear, unless very stringent laws are

made for its protection; but at least its existence will for some years prevent the total extermination of the species as a whole. It must be kept in mind that even this shyer kind of buffalo has not got the keen senses of other large game, such as moose; and it is more easily followed and much more keenly and eagerly sought after than would be any other animal smaller and less valuable to the hunter than itself.

While the slaughter of the buffalo has been in places needless and brutal, and while it is greatly to be regretted that the species is likely to become extinct, and while, moreover, from a purely selfish standpoint, many, including myself, would rather see it continue to exist as the chief feature in the unchanged life of the Western wilderness; yet, on the other hand, it must be remembered that its continued existence in any numbers was absolutely incompatible with anything but a very sparse settlement of the country; and that its destruction was the condition precedent upon the advance of white civilization in the West, and was a positive boon to the more thrifty and industrious frontiersmen. Where the buffalo were plenty, they ate up all the grass that could have supported cattle. The country over which the huge herds grazed during the last year or two of their existence was cropped bare, and the grass did not grow to its normal height and become able

to support cattle, for, in some cases two, in others three, seasons. Every buffalo needed as much food as an ox or cow; and if the former abounded, the latter perforce would have to be scarce. Above all, the extermination of the buffalo was the only way of solving the Indian question. As long as this large animal of the chase existed, the Indians simply could not be kept on reservations, and always had an ample supply of meat on hand to support them in the event of a war; and its disappearance was the only method of forcing them to at least partially abandon their savage mode of life. From the standpoint of humanity at large, the extermination of the buffalo has been a blessing. The many have been benefited by it; and I suppose the comparatively few of us who would have preferred the continuance of the old order of things, merely for the sake of our own selfish enjoyment, have no right to complain.

The buffalo is easier killed than is any other kind of plains game; but its chase is very far from being the tame amusement it has been lately represented. It is genuine sport; it needs skill, marksmanship, and hardihood in the man who follows it, and if he hunts on horseback, it needs also pluck and good riding. It is in no way akin to various forms of so-called sport in vogue in parts of the East, such as killing deer in a lake or by fire hunting, or even by watching

at a runway. No man who is not of an adventurous temper, and able to stand rough food and living, will penetrate to the haunts of the buffalo. The animal is so tough and tenacious of life that it must be hit in the right spot; and care must be used in approaching it, for its nose is very keen, and though its sight is dull, yet, on the other hand, the plains it frequents are singularly bare of cover; while, finally, there is just a faint spice of danger in the pursuit, for the bison, though the least dangerous of all bovine animals, will, on occasions, turn upon the hunter, and though its attack is, as a rule, easily avoided, yet in rare cases it manages to charge home. A ranchman of my acquaintance once, many years ago, went out buffalo hunting on horseback, together with a friend who was unused to the sport, and who was mounted on a large, untrained, nervous horse. While chasing a bull, the friend's horse became unmanageable, and when the bull turned, proved too clumsy to get out of the way, and was caught on the horns, one of which entered its flank, while the other inflicted a huge, bruised gash across the man's thigh, tearing the muscles all out. Both horse and rider were flung to the ground with tremendous violence. The horse had to be killed, and the man died in a few hours from the shock, loss of blood, and internal injuries. Such an accident, however, is very exceptional.

My brother was in at the death of the great Southern herds in 1877, and had a good deal of experience in buffalo hunting; and once or twice was charged by old bulls, but never had any difficulty in either evading the charge or else killing the brute as it came on. My cousin, John Roosevelt, also had one adventure with a buffalo, in which he received rather a fright. He had been out on foot with a dog and had severely wounded a buffalo bull, which nevertheless, with the wonderful tenacity of life and ability to go over apparently inaccessible places that this species shows, managed to clamber up a steep, almost perpendicular, cliff. My cousin climbed up after it, with some difficulty; on reaching the top he got his elbows over and drew himself up on them only to find the buffalo fronting him with lowered head not a dozen feet off. Immediately upon seeing him it cocked up its tail and came forward. He was clinging with both hands to the edge and could not use his rifle; so, not relishing what was literally a *tête-à-tête*, he promptly let go and slid or rather rolled head over heels to the foot of the cliff, not hurting himself much in the sand, though of course a good deal jarred by the fall. The buffalo came on till its hoofs crumbled the earth at the brink, when the dog luckily got up and distracted its attention; meanwhile, my cousin, having bounced

down to the bottom, picked himself up, shook himself, and finding that nothing was broken, promptly scrambled up the bluff at another place a few yards off and shot his antagonist.

When my cattle first came on the Little Missouri three of my men took a small bunch of them some fifty miles to the south and there wintered with them on what were then the outskirts of the buffalo range, the herds having been pressed up northwards. In the intervals of tending the cattle—work which was then entirely new to them—they occupied themselves in hunting buffalo, killing during the winter sixty or seventy, some of them on horseback, but mostly by still-hunting them on foot. Once or twice the bulls, when wounded, turned to bay; and a couple of them on one occasion charged one of the men and forced him to take refuge upon a steep isolated butte. At another time the three of them wounded a cow so badly that she broke down and would run no farther, turning to bay in a small clump of thick trees. As this would have been a very bad place in which to skin the body, they wished to get her out and tried to tease her into charging; but she seemed too weak to make the effort. Emboldened by her apathy, one of the men came up close to her behind, while another was standing facing her; and the former finally entered the grove of trees and poked her with a

long stick. This waked her up most effectually, and instead of turning on her assailant she went headlong at the man in front. He leaped to one side just in time, one of her horns grazing him, ripping away his clothes and knocking him over; as he lay she tried to jump on him with her fore-feet, but he rolled to one side, and as she went past she kicked at him like a vicious mule. The effort exhausted her, however, and she fell before going a dozen yards farther. The man who was charged had rather a close shave; thanks to the rashness and contempt of the game's prowess which they all felt—for all three are very quiet men and not afraid of anything. It is always a good rule to be cautious in dealing with an apparently dead or dying buffalo. About the time the above incident occurred a party of hunters near my ranch killed a buffalo, as they thought, and tied a pony to its foreleg, to turn it over, as its position was a very bad one for skinning. Barely had the pony been tied when the buffalo came to with a jump, killed the unfortunate pony, and needed a dozen more balls before he fell for good.

At that time the buffalo would occasionally be scattered among the cattle, but, as a rule, avoided the latter and seemed to be afraid of them; while the cattle, on the contrary, had no apparent dread of the buffalo, unless it happened

that on some occasion they got caught by a herd of the latter that had stampeded. A settler or small ranchman, not far from my place, was driving a team of oxen in a wagon one day three years since, when, in crossing a valley, he encountered a little herd of stampeded buffalo, who, in their blind and heedless terror, ran into him and knocked over the wagon and oxen. The oxen never got over the fright the rough handling caused them, and ever afterward became unmanageable and tore off at sight or smell of a buffalo. It is said that the few buffalo left in the country through which the head waters of the Belle Fourche flow, have practically joined themselves to the great herds of cattle now found all over that region.

Buffalo are very easily tamed. On a neighboring ranch there are four which were taken when very young calves. They wander about with the cattle, and are quite as familiar as any of them, and do not stray any farther away. One of them was captured when a yearling, by the help of a large yellow hound. The cowboy had been chasing it some time and, finally, fearing it might escape, hied on the hound, which dashed in, caught the buffalo by the ear, and finally brought it down to its knees, when the cowboy, by means of his lariat, secured it, and, with the help of a companion, managed to get

it back to the ranch. Buffalo can be trained to draw a wagon, and are valuable for their great strength; but they are very headstrong and stupid. If thirsty, for instance, and they smell or see water, it is absolutely impossible to prevent their going to it, no matter if it is in such a place that they have to upset the wagon to get down to it, nor how deep the mud is. When tamed, they do not seem to be as ferocious as ordinary cattle that are allowed to go free; but they are such strong, blundering brutes that very few fences will hold them.

My men, in hunting buffalo, which was with them an occasional occupation and not a regular pursuit, used light Winchesters; but the professional buffalo hunters carried either 40–90 or 45–120 Sharps, than which there are in the world no rifles more accurate or powerful; with the larger-calibred ones (45 or 50) a man could easily kill an elephant. These weapons are excellent for very long range work, being good for half a mile and over; and sometimes the hunters were able to kill very many buffalo at a time, owing to their curious liability to fits of stupid, panic terror. Sometimes when these panics seize them they stampede and run off in headlong, heedless flight, going over anything in their way. Once, in midwinter, one of my men was lying out in the open, under a heavy roll of furs, the wagon-sheet over

all. During the night a small herd of stampeded buffalo passed by, and one of them jumped on the bed, almost trampling on the sleeper, and then bounded off, as the latter rose with a yell. The others of the herd passed almost within arm's length on each side.

Occasionally, these panic fits have the opposite effect, and make them run together and stand still in a stupid, frightened manner. This is now and then the result when a hunter fires at a herd while keeping himself concealed; and on rare occasions (for buffalo act very differently at different times, according to their moods) it occurs even when he is in full sight. When they are made to act thus it is called in hunters' parlance getting a "stand" on them; and often thirty or forty have been killed in one such stand, the hunter hardly shifting his position the whole time. Often, with their long-range heavy rifles, the hunters would fire a number of shots into a herd half a mile off, and on approaching would find that they had bagged several—for the Sharps rifle has a very long range, and the narrow, heavy conical bullets will penetrate almost anything. Once, while, coming in over the plains with an ox-wagon, two of my cowboys surprised a band of buffaloes, which, on being fired at, ran clear round them and then made a stand in nearly their former position; and there they stood until the men had

fired away most of their ammunition, but only half a dozen or so were killed, the Winchesters being too light for such a distance. Hunting on foot is much the most destructive way of pursuing buffaloes; but it lacks the excitement of chasing them with horses.

When in Texas my brother had several chances to hunt them on horseback, while making a trip as guest of a captain of United States cavalry. The country through which they hunted was rolling and well watered, the buffalo being scattered over it in bands of no great size. While riding out to look for the game they were mounted on large horses; when a band was spied they would dismount and get on the smaller buffalo ponies which the orderlies had been leading behind them. Then they would carefully approach from the leeward side, if possible keeping behind some hill or divide. When this was no longer possible they trotted gently towards the game, which usually gathered together and stood for a moment looking at them. The instant the buffalo turned, the spurs were put in and the ponies raced forward for all there was in them, it being an important point to close as soon as possible, as buffalo, though not swift, are very enduring. Usually a half a mile took the hunters up to the game, when each singled out his animal, rode alongside on its left flank, so close as almost to be able to

touch it with the hand, and fired the heavy revolver into the loins or small of the back, the bullet ranging forward. At the instant of firing, the trained pony swerved off to the left, almost at right angles to its former course, so as to avoid the lunging charge sometimes made by the wounded brute. If the animal kept on, the hunter, having made a half circle, again closed up and repeated the shot; very soon the buffalo came to a halt, then its head dropped, it straddled widely with its forelegs, swayed to and fro, and pitched heavily forward on its side. The secret of success in this sort of hunting is to go right up by the side of the buffalo; if a man stays off at a distance of fifteen or twenty feet he may fire a score of shots and not kill or cripple his game.

While hunting this, the largest of American animals, on horseback, is doubtless the most exciting way in which its chase can be carried on, we must beware of crying down its pursuit on foot. To be sure, in the latter case, the actual stalking and shooting the buffalo does not need on the part of the hunter as much skill and as good marksmanship as is the case in hunting most other kinds of large game, and is but a trifle more risky; yet, on the other hand, the fatigue of following the game is much greater, and the country is usually so wild as to call for

some hardihood and ability to stand rough work on the part of the man who penetrates it.

One September I determined to take a short trip after bison. At that time I was staying in a cow-camp a good many miles up the river from my ranch; there were then no cattle south of me, where there are now very many thousand head, and the buffalo had been plentiful in the country for a couple of winters past, but the last of the herds had been destroyed or driven out six months before, and there were only a few stragglers left. It was one of my first hunting trips; previously, I had shot with the rifle very little, and that only at deer or antelope. I took as a companion one of my best men, named Ferris (a brother of the Ferris already mentioned); we rode a couple of ponies, not very good ones, and each carried his roll of blankets and a very small store of food in a pack behind the saddle.

Leaving the cow-camp early in the morning, we crossed the Little Missouri and for the first ten miles threaded our way through the narrow defiles and along the tortuous divides of a great tract of Bad Lands. Although it was fall and the nights were cool, the sun was very hot in the middle of the day, and we jogged along at a slow pace, so as not to tire our ponies. Two or three black-tail deer were seen, some distance off, and, when we were a couple of hours on our journey,

we came across the fresh track of a bull buffalo. Buffalo wander a great distance, for, though they do not go fast, yet they may keep travelling, as they graze, all day long; and though this one had evidently passed but a few hours before, we were not sure we would see him. His tracks were easily followed as long as he had kept to the soft creek bottom, crossing and recrossing the narrow wet ditch which wound its way through it; but when he left this and turned up a winding coulie that branched out in every direction, his hoofs scarcely made any marks in the hard ground. We rode up the ravine, carefully examining the soil for nearly half an hour, however; finally, as we passed the mouth of a little side coulie, there was a plunge and crackle through the bushes at its head, and a shabby-looking old bull bison galloped out of it and, without an instant's hesitation, plunged over a steep bank into a patch of rotten, broken ground which led around the base of a high butte. So quickly did he disappear that we had not time to dismount and fire. Spurring our horses we galloped up to the brink of the cliff down which he had plunged; it was remarkable that he should have gone down it unhurt. From where we stood we could see nothing; so, getting our horses over the broken ground as fast as possible, we ran to the butte and rode round it, only to see the buffalo come out of the

broken land and climb up the side of another butte over a quarter of a mile off. In spite of his great weight and cumbersome, heavy-looking gait, he climbed up the steep bluff with ease and even agility, and when he had reached the ridge stood and looked back at us for a moment; while so doing he held his head high up, and at that distance his great shaggy mane and huge fore-quarter made him look like a lion. In another second he again turned away and made off; and being evidently very shy and accustomed to being harassed by hunters, must have travelled a long distance before stopping, for we followed his trail for some miles until it got on such hard, dry ground that his hoofs did not leave a scrape in the soil, and yet did not again catch so much as a glimpse of him.

Soon after leaving his trail we came out on the great, broken prairies that lie far back from the river. These are by no means everywhere level. A flat space of a mile or two will be bounded by a low cliff or a row of small round-topped buttes; or will be interrupted by a long, gently sloping ridge, the divide between two creeks; or by a narrow canyon, perhaps thirty feet deep and not a dozen wide, stretching for miles before there is a crossing place. The smaller creeks were dried up, and were merely sinuous hollows in the prairie; but one or two of the larger ones held

water here and there, and cut down through the land in bold, semicircular sweeps, the outside of each curve being often bounded by a steep bluff with trees at its bottom, and occasionally holding a miry pool. At one of these pools we halted, about ten o'clock in the morning, and lunched; the banks were so steep and rotten that we had to bring water to the more clumsy of the two ponies in a hat.

Then we remounted and fared on our way, scanning the country far and near from every divide, but seeing no trace of game. The air was hot and still, and the brown, barren land stretched out on every side for leagues of dreary sameness. Once we came to a canyon which ran across our path, and followed along its brink for a mile to find a place where we could get into it; when we finally found such a place, we had to back the horses down to the bottom and then lead them along it for some hundred yards before finding a break through which we could climb out.

It was late in the afternoon before we saw any game; then we made out in the middle of a large plain three black specks, which proved to be buffalo—old bulls. Our horses had come a good distance, under a hot sun, and, as they had had no water except from the mud-hole in the morning, they were in no condition for running. They were not very fast, anyhow; so, though the ground

was unfavorable, we made up our minds to try to creep up to the buffalo. We left the ponies in a hollow half a mile from the game, and started off on our hands and knees, taking advantage of every sage-brush as cover. After a while we had to lie flat on our bodies and wriggle like snakes; and while doing this I blundered into a bed of cactus, and filled my hands with the spines. After taking advantage of every hollow, hillock, or sage-brush, we got within about a hundred and twenty-five or fifty yards of where the three bulls were unconsciously feeding, and as all between was bare ground I drew up and fired. It was the first time I ever shot at buffalo, and, confused by the bulk and shaggy hair of the beast, I aimed too far back at one that was standing nearly broadside on towards me. The bullet told on his body with a loud crack, the dust flying up from his hide; but it did not work him any immediate harm, or in the least hinder him from making off; and away went all three, with their tails up, disappearing over a light rise in the ground.

Much disgusted, we trotted back to where the horses were picketed, jumped on them, a good deal out of breath, and rode after the flying game. We thought that the wounded one might turn out and leave the others; and so followed them, though they had over a mile's start. For seven or eight miles we loped our jaded horses along at

a brisk pace, occasionally seeing the buffalo far ahead; and finally, when the sun had just set, we saw that all three had come to a stand in a gentle hollow. There was no cover anywhere near them; and, as a last desperate resort, we concluded to try to run them on our worn-out ponies.

As we cantered toward them they faced us for a second and then turned round and made off, while with spurs and quirts we made the ponies put on a burst that enabled us to close in with the wounded one just about the time that the lessening twilight had almost vanished; while the rim of the full moon rose above the horizon. The pony I was on could barely hold his own, after getting up within sixty or seventy yards of the wounded bull; my companion, better mounted, forged ahead, a little to one side. The bull saw him coming and swerved from his course, and by cutting across I was able to get nearly up to him. The ground over which we were running was fearful, being broken into holes and ditches, separated by hillocks; in the dull light, and at the speed we were going, no attempt could be made to guide the horses, and the latter, fagged out by their exertions, floundered and pitched forward at every stride, hardly keeping their legs. When up within twenty feet I fired my rifle, but the darkness, and especially the violent

labored motion of my pony, made me miss; I tried to get in closer, when suddenly up went the bull's tail, and, wheeling, he charged me with lowered horns. My pony, frightened into momentary activity, spun round and tossed up his head; I was holding the rifle in both hands, and the pony's head, striking it, knocked it violently against my forehead, cutting quite a gash, from which, heated as I was, the blood poured into my eyes. Meanwhile the buffalo, passing me, charged my companion, and followed him as he made off, and, as the ground was very bad, for some little distance his lowered head was unpleasantly near the tired pony's tail. I tried to run in on him again, but my pony stopped short, dead beat; and by no spurring could I force him out of a slow trot. My companion jumped off and took a couple of shots at the buffalo, which missed in the dim moonlight; and to our unutterable chagrin the wounded bull labored off and vanished in the darkness. I made after him on foot, in hopeless and helpless wrath, until he got out of sight.

Our horses were completely done out; we did not mount them again, but led them slowly along, trembling, foaming, and sweating. The ground was moist in places, and after an hour's search we found in a reedy hollow a little mud-pool, with water so slimy that it was almost gelatinous. Thirsty though we were, for we had not drunk

for twelve hours, neither man nor horse could swallow more than a mouthful or two of this water. We unsaddled the horses, and made our beds by the hollow, each eating a biscuit; there was not a twig with which to make a fire, nor anything to which we might fasten the horses. Spreading the saddle-blankets under us, and our own over us, we lay down, with the saddles as pillows, to which we had been obliged to lariat our steeds.

The ponies stood about, almost too tired to eat; but in spite of their fatigue they were very watchful and restless, continually snorting or standing with their ears forward, peering out into the night; wild beasts, or some such things, were about. The day before we had had a false alarm from supposed hostile Indians, who turned out to be merely half-breed Crees; and, as we were in a perfectly lonely part of the wilderness, we knew we were in the domain of both white and red horse-thieves, and that the latter might, in addition to our horses, try to take our scalps. It was some time before we dozed off, waking up with a start whenever we heard the horses stop grazing and stand motionless with heads raised, looking out into the darkness. But at last, tired out, we fell sound asleep.

About midnight we were rudely wakened by having our pillows whipped out from under our

heads; and as we started from the bed we saw, in the bright moonlight, the horses galloping madly off with the saddles, tied to the lariats whose other ends were around their necks, bounding and trailing after them. Our first thought was that they had been stampeded by horse-thieves, and we rolled over and crouched down in the grass with our rifles; but nothing could be seen, except a shadowy four-footed form in the hollow, and in the end we found that the horses must have taken alarm at a wolf or wolves that had come up to the edge of the bank and looked over at us, not being able at first to make out what we were.

We did not expect to find the horses again that night, but nevertheless took up the broad trail made by the saddles as they dragged through the dewy grass, and followed it well in the moonlight. Our task proved easier than we had feared; for they had not run much over half a mile, and we found them standing close together and looking intently round when we came up. Leading them back we again went to sleep; but the weather was rapidly changing, and by three o'clock a fine rain began to come steadily down, and we cowered and shivered under our wet blankets till morning. At the first streak of dawn, having again eaten a couple of biscuits, we were off, glad to bid good-by to the inhospitable pool, in whose

neighborhood we had spent such a comfortless night. A fine, drizzling mist shrouded us and hid from sight all distant objects; and at times there were heavy down-pours of rain. Before we had gone any distance we became what is termed by backwoodsmen or plainsmen, "turned round," and the creeks suddenly seemed to be running the wrong way; after which we travelled purely by the compass.

For some hours we kept a nearly straight course over the formless, shapeless plain, drenched through, and thoroughly uncomfortable; then, as we rose over a low divide, the fog lifted for a few minutes, and we saw several black objects slowly crossing some rolling country ahead of us, and a glance satisfied us they were buffalo. The horses were picketed at once, and we ran up as near the game as we dared, and then began to stalk them, creeping forward on our hands and knees through the soft, muddy prairie soil, while a smart shower of rain blew in our faces, as we advanced up wind. The country was favorable, and we got within less than a hundred yards of the nearest, a large cow, though we had to creep along so slowly that we were chilled through, and our teeth chattered behind our blue lips. To crown my misfortunes, I now made one of those misses which a man to his dying day always looks back upon with wonder and regret. The rain was beating in my eyes, and

the drops stood out in the sights of the rifle so that I could hardly draw a bead; and I either overshot or else at the last moment must have given a nervous jerk and pulled the rifle clear off the mark. At any rate, I missed clean, and the whole band plunged down into a hollow and were off before, with my stiffened and numbed fingers, I could get another shot; and in wet, sullen misery we plodded back to the ponies.

All that day the rain continued, and we passed another wretched night. Next morning, however, it had cleared off, and as the sun rose brightly we forgot our hunger and sleepiness, and rode cheerily off up a large dry creek, in whose bottom pools of rain-water still stood. During the morning, however, our ill-luck continued. My companion's horse almost trod on a rattlesnake, and narrowly escaped being bitten. While riding along the face of a steeply-inclined bluff the sandy soil broke away under the ponies' hoofs, and we slid and rolled down to the bottom, where we came to in a heap, horses and men. Then while galloping through a brush-covered bottom my pony put both forefeet in a hole made by the falling and uprooting of a tree, and turned a complete somersault, pitching me a good ten feet beyond his head. And, finally, while crossing what looked like the hard bed of a dry creek, the earth gave way under my horse as if he had stepped on a

trap-door and let him down to his withers in soft, sticky mud. I was off at once and floundered to the bank, loosening the lariat from the saddle-bow; and both of us turning to with a will, and bringing the other pony into our aid, hauled him out by the rope, pretty nearly strangling him in so doing; and he looked rather a melancholy object as he stood up, trembling and shaking, and plastered with mire from head to tail.

So far the trip had certainly not been a success, although sufficiently varied as regards its incidents. We had been confined to moist biscuits for three days as our food; had been wet and cold at night, and sunburned until our faces peeled in the day; were hungry and tired, and had met with bad weather, and all kinds of accidents; in addition to which I had shot badly. But a man who is fond of sport, and yet is not naturally a good hunter, soon learns that if he wishes any success at all he must both keep in memory and put in practice Anthony Trollope's famous precept: "It's dogged as does it." And if he keeps doggedly on in his course the odds are heavy that in the end the longest lane will prove to have a turning. Such was the case on this occasion.

Shortly after midday we left the creek bottom, and skirted a ridge of broken buttes, cut up by gullies and winding ravines, in whose bottoms grew bunch-grass. While passing near the mouth,

and to leeward of one of these ravines, both ponies threw up their heads, and snuffed the air, turning their muzzles towards the head of the gully. Feeling sure that they had smelt some wild beast, either a bear or a buffalo, I slipped off my pony, and ran quickly but cautiously up along the valley. Before I had gone a hundred yards, I noticed in the soft soil at the bottom the round prints of a bison's hoofs; and immediately afterwards got a glimpse of the animal himself, as he fed slowly up the course of the ravine, some distance ahead of me. The wind was just right, and no ground could have been better for stalking. Hardly needing to bend down, I walked up behind a small sharp-crested hillock, and peeping over, there below me, not fifty yards off, was a great bison bull. He was walking along, grazing as he walked. His glossy fall coat was in fine trim, and shone in the rays of the sun; while his pride of bearing showed him to be in the lusty vigor of his prime. As I rose above the crest of the hill, he held up his head and cocked his tail in the air. Before he could go off, I put the bullet in behind his shoulder. The wound was an almost immediately fatal one, yet with surprising agility for so large and heavy an animal, he bounded up the opposite side of the ravine, heedless of two more balls, both of which went into his flank and ranged forwards, and disappeared over the ridge

at a lumbering gallop, the blood pouring from his mouth and nostrils. We knew he could not go far, and trotted leisurely along on his bloody trail; and in the next gully we found him stark dead, lying almost on his back, having pitched over the side when he tried to go down it. His head was a remarkably fine one, even for a fall buffalo. He was lying in a very bad position, and it was most tedious and tiresome work to cut it off and pack it out. The flesh of a cow or calf is better eating than is that of a bull; but the so-called hump meat—that is, the strip of steak on each side of the backbone—is excellent and tender and juicy. Buffalo meat is with difficulty to be distinguished from ordinary beef. At any rate, the flesh of this bull tasted uncommonly good to us, for we had been without fresh meat for a week; and until a healthy, active man has been without it for some little time, he does not know how positively and almost painfully hungry for flesh he becomes, no matter how much farinaceous food he may have. And the very toil I had been obliged to go through, in order to procure the head, made me feel all the prouder of it when at last it was in my possession.

A year later I made another trip, this time with a wagon, through what had once been a famous buffalo range, the divide between the Little Missouri and the Powder, at its northern

end, where some of the creeks flowing into the Yellowstone also head up; but, though in most places throughout the range the grass had not yet grown from the time, a few months before, when it had been cropped off down close to the roots by the grazing herds, and though the ground was cut up in all directions by buffalo trails, and covered by their innumerable skulls and skeletons, not a living one did we see, and only one moderately fresh track, which we followed until we lost it. Some of the sharper ridges were of soft, crumbling sandstone, and when a buffalo trail crossed such a one, it generally made a curious heart-shaped cut, the feet of the animals sinking the narrow path continually deeper and deeper, while their bodies brushed out the sides. The profile of a ridge across which several trails led had rather a curious look when seen against the sky.

Game was scarce on this broken plains country, where the water supply was very scanty, and where the dull brown grass that grew on the parched, sun-cracked ground had already been cropped close; still we found enough to keep us in fresh meat; and though no buffalo were seen, the trip was a pleasant one. There was a certain charm in the very vastness and the lonely, melancholy desolation of the land over which every day we galloped far and wide from dawn till

nightfall; while the heavy canvas-covered wagon lumbered slowly along to the appointed halting-place. On such a trip one soon gets to feel that the wagon is home; and after a tiresome day it is pleasant just to lie still in the twilight by the side of the smouldering fire and watch the men as they busy themselves cooking or arranging the beds, while the solemn old ponies graze around or stand quietly by the great white-topped prairie schooner.

The blankets and rubbers being arranged in a carefully chosen spot to leeward of the wagon, we were not often bothered at night, even by quite heavy rainfalls; but once or twice, when in peculiarly exposed places, we were struck by such furious gusts of wind and rain that we were forced to gather up our bedding and hastily scramble into the wagon, where we would at least be dry, even though in pretty cramped quarters.

## CHAPTER IV

### STILL-HUNTING ELK ON THE MOUNTAINS

AFTER the buffalo, the elk are the first animals to disappear from a country when it is settled. This arises from their size and consequent conspicuousness, and the eagerness with which they are followed by hunters; and also because of their gregariousness and their occasional fits of stupid panic, during whose continuance hunters can now and then work great slaughter in a herd. Five years ago, elk were abundant in the valley of the Little Missouri, and in fall were found wandering in great bands of over a hundred individuals each. But they have now vanished completely, except that one or two may still lurk in some of the most remote and broken places where there are deep, wooded ravines.

Formerly, the elk were plentiful all over the plains, coming down into them in great bands during the fall months and traversing their entire extent. But the incoming of hunters and cattlemen has driven them off the ground as completely as the buffalo; unlike the latter, however, they

are still very common in the dense woods that cover the Rocky Mountains and the other great Western chains. In the old days, running elk on horseback was a highly esteemed form of plains sport; but now that it has become a beast of the timber and the craggy ground, instead of a beast of the open, level prairie, it is followed almost solely on foot and with the rifle. Its sense of smell is very acute, and it has good eyes and quick ears; and its wariness makes it under ordinary circumstances very difficult to approach. But it is subject to fits of panic folly, and during their continuance great numbers can be destroyed. A band places almost as much reliance upon the leaders as does a flock of sheep; and if the leaders are shot down, the others will huddle together in a terrified mass, seemingly unable to make up their minds in which direction to flee. When one, more bold than the rest, does at last step out, the hidden hunter's at once shooting it down will produce a fresh panic. I have known of twenty elk (or wapiti, as they are occasionally called) being thus procured out of one band. And at times they show a curious indifference to danger, running up on a hunter who is in plain sight, or standing still for a few fatal seconds to gaze at one that unexpectedly appears.

In spite of its size and strength and great branching antlers, the elk is but little more dan-

gerous to the hunter than is an ordinary buck. Once, in coming up to a wounded one, I had it strike at me with its forefeet, bristling up the hair on the neck, and making a harsh, grating noise with its teeth; as its back was broken it could not get at me, but the savage glare in its eyes left me no doubt as to its intentions. Only in a single instance have I ever known of a hunter being regularly charged by one of these great deer. He had struck a band of elk and wounded an old bull, which, after going a couple of miles, received another ball and then separated from the rest of the herd and took refuge in a dense patch of small timber. The hunter went in on its trail and came upon it lying down; it jumped to its feet, and, with hair all bristling, made a regular charge upon its pursuer, who leaped out of the way behind a tree just in time to avoid it. It crashed past through the undergrowth without turning, and he killed it with a third and last shot. But this was a very exceptional case, and in most instances the elk submits to death with hardly an effort at resistance; it is by no means as dangerous an antagonist as is a bull moose.

The elk is unfortunately one of those animals seemingly doomed to total destruction at no distant date. Already its range has shrunk to far less than one half its former size. Originally, it was found as far as the Atlantic sea-board; I

have myself known of several sets of antlers preserved in the house of a Long Island gentleman, whose ancestors had killed the bearers shortly after the first settlement of New York. Even so late as the first years of this century, elk were found in many mountainous and densely wooded places east of the Mississippi: in New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and all of what were then the Northwestern States and Territories. The last individual of the race in the Adirondacks was killed in 1834; in Pennsylvania, not till nearly thirty years later; while a very few are still to be found in Northern Michigan. Elsewhere, they must now be sought far to the west of the Mississippi; and even there they are almost gone from the great plains, and are only numerous in the deep mountain forests. Wherever it exists the skin-hunters and meat-butchers wage the most relentless and unceasing war upon it for the sake of its hide and flesh, and their unremitting persecution is thinning out the herds with terrible rapidity.

The gradual extermination of this, the most stately and beautiful animal of the chase to be found in America, can be looked upon only with unmixed regret by every sportsman and lover of nature. Excepting the moose, it is the largest and, without exception, it is the noblest of the deer tribe. No other species of true deer, in either

the Old or the New World, comes up to it in size and in the shape, length, and weight of its mighty antlers; while the grand, proud carriage and lordly bearing of an old bull make it perhaps the most majestic-looking of all the animal creation. The open plains have already lost one of their great attractions, now that we no more see the long lines of elk trotting across them; and it will be a sad day when the lordly, antlered beasts are no longer found in the wild rocky glens and among the lonely woods of towering pines that cover the great Western mountain chains.

The elk has other foes besides man. The grizzly will always make a meal of one if he gets a chance; and against his ponderous weight and savage prowess hoofs and antlers avail but little. Still he is too clumsy and easily avoided ever to do very much damage in the herds. Cougars, where they exist, work more havoc. A bull elk in rutting season, if on his guard, would with ease beat off a cougar; but the sly, cunning cat takes its quarry unawares, and once the cruel fangs are fastened in the game's throat or neck, no plunging or struggling can shake it off. The gray timber wolves also join in twos and threes to hunt down and hamstring the elk, if other game is scarce. But these great deer can hold their own and make head against all their brute foes; it is only when

pitted against Man the Destroyer, that they succumb in the struggle for life.

I have never shot any elk in the immediate neighborhood of where my cattle range; but I have had very good sport with them in a still wilder and more western region; and this I will now describe.

During last summer we found it necessary to leave my ranch on the Little Missouri and take quite a long trip through the cattle country of Southeastern Montana and Northern Wyoming; and, having come to the foot of the Bighorn Mountains, we took a fortnight's hunt through them after elk and bear.

We went into the mountains with a pack-train, leaving the ranch-wagon at the place where we began to go up the first steep rise. There were two others, besides myself, in the party; one of them, the teamster, a weather-beaten old plainsman, who possessed a most extraordinary stock of miscellaneous misinformation upon every conceivable subject, and the other my ranch foreman, Merrifield. None of us had ever been within two hundred miles of the Bighorn range before; so that our hunting-trip had the added zest of being also an exploring expedition.

Each of us rode one pony, and the packs were carried on four others. We were not burdened by much baggage. Having no tent, we took the

canvas wagon sheet instead; our bedding, plenty of spare cartridges, some flour, bacon, coffee, sugar, and salt, and a few very primitive cooking utensils, completed the outfit.

The Bighorn range is a chain of bare, rocky peaks stretching lengthwise along the middle of a table-land which is about thirty miles wide. At its edges this table-land falls sheer off into the rolling plains country. From the rocky peaks flow rapid brooks of clear, icy water, which take their way through deep gorges that they have channelled out in the surface of the plateau; a few miles from the heads of the streams these gorges become regular canyons, with sides so steep as to be almost perpendicular; in travelling, therefore, the trail has to keep well up toward timber line, as lower down horses find it difficult or impossible to get across the valleys. In strong contrast to the treeless cattle plains extending to its foot, the sides of the table-land are densely wooded with tall pines. Its top forms what is called a park country; that is, it is covered with alternating groves of trees and open glades, each grove or glade varying in size from half a dozen to many hundred acres.

We went in with the pack-train two days' journey before pitching camp in what we intended to be our hunting-grounds, following an old Indian trail. No one who has not tried it can

understand the work and worry that it is to drive a pack-train over rough ground and through timber. We were none of us very skilful at packing, and the loads were all the time slipping; sometimes the ponies would stampede with the pack half tied, or they would get caught among the fallen logs, or in a ticklish place would suddenly decline to follow the trail, or would commit some one of the thousand other tricks which seem to be all a pack-pony knows. Then at night they were a bother; if picketed out, they fed badly and got thin, and if they were not picketed they sometimes strayed away. The most valuable one of the lot was also the hardest to catch. Accordingly, we used to let him loose with a long lariat tied round his neck, and one night this lariat twisted up in a sage-brush, and in struggling to free himself the pony got a half hitch round his hind leg, threw himself, and fell over a bank into a creek on a large stone. We found him in the morning very much the worse for wear and his hind legs swelled up so that his chief method of progression was by a series of awkward hops. Of course, no load could be put upon him, but he managed to limp along behind the other horses, and actually in the end reached the ranch on the Little Missouri, three hundred miles off. No sooner had he got there and been turned loose to rest than he fell down a big wash-out and broke

his neck. Another time one of the mares—a homely beast with a head like a camel's—managed to flounder into the very centre of a mud-hole, and we spent the better part of the morning in fishing her out.

It was on the second day of our journey into the mountains, while leading the pack-ponies down the precipitous side of a steep valley, that I obtained my first sight of elk. The trail wound through a forest of tall, slender pines, standing very close together, and with dead trees lying in every direction. The narrow trunks or overhanging limbs threatened to scrape off the packs at every moment, as the ponies hopped and scrambled over the fallen trunks; and it was difficult work, and most trying to the temper, to keep them going along straight and prevent them from wandering off to one side or the other. At last we got out into a succession of small, open glades, with boggy spots in them; the lowest glade was of some size, and as we reached it we saw a small band of cow elk disappearing into the woods on its other edge. I was riding a restive horse, and when I tried to jump off to shoot, it reared and turned round, before I could get my left foot out of the stirrup; when I at last got free I could get a glimpse of but one elk, vanishing behind a dead trunk, and my hasty shot missed. I was a good deal annoyed at this, my opening experience

with mountain game, feeling that it was an omen of misfortune; but it did not prove so, for during the rest of my two weeks' stay, I with one exception got every animal I fired at.

A beautiful clear mountain brook ran through the bottom of the valley, and in an open space by its side we pitched camp. We were entirely out of fresh meat, and after lunch all three of us separated to hunt, each for his own hand. The teamster went up-stream, Merrifield went down, while I followed the tracks of the band of cows and calves that we had started in the morning; their trail led along the wooded hill-crests parallel to the stream, and therefore to Merrifield's course. The crests of the hills formed a wavy-topped but continuous ridge between two canyon-like valleys, and the sides fell off steeper and steeper the farther down-stream I went, until at last they were broken in places by sheer precipices and cliffs; the groves of trees, too, though with here and there open glades, formed a continuous forest of tall pines. There was a small growth of young spruce and other evergreen, thick enough to give cover, but not to interfere with seeing and shooting to some distance. The pine trunks rose like straight columns, standing quite close together; and at their bases the ground was carpeted with the sweet-scented needles, over which, in my moccasined feet, I trod without any noise. It was but

a little past noon, and the sun in the open was very hot; yet underneath the great archways of the pine woods the air though still was cool, and the sunbeams that struggled down here and there through the interlacing branches, and glinted on the rough trunks, only made bright spots in what was elsewhere the uniform, grayish half-light of the mountain forest. Game trails threaded the woods in all directions, made for the most part by the elk. These animals, when not disturbed, travel strung out in single file, each one stepping very nearly in the tracks of the one before it; they are great wanderers, going over an immense amount of country during the course of a day, and so they soon wear regular, well-beaten paths in any place where they are at all plentiful.

The band I was following had, as is their custom, all run together into a wedge-shaped mass when I fired, and crashed off through the woods in a bunch during the first moments of alarm. The footprints in the soil showed that they had in the beginning taken a plunging gallop, but after a few strides had settled into the swinging, ground-covering trot that is the elk's most natural and characteristic gait. A band of elk, when alarmed, is likely to go twenty miles without halting; but these had probably been very little molested, and there was a chance that they would not go far without stopping. After getting through the first

grove, the huddled herd had straightened itself out into single file, and trotted off in a nearly straight line. A mile or two of ground having been passed over in this way, the animals had slackened their pace into a walk, evidently making up their minds that they were out of danger. Soon afterwards they had begun to go slower, and to scatter out on each side, browsing or grazing.

It was not difficult work to follow up the band at first. While trotting, their sharp hoofs came down with sufficient force to leave very distinct footprints, and, moreover, the trail was the more readily made out as all the animals trod nearly in each other's steps. But when the band spread out the tracking was much harder, as each single one, walking slowly along, merely made here and there a slight scrape in the soil or a faint indentation in the bed of pine needles. Besides, I had to advance with the greatest caution, keeping the sharpest lookout in front and on all sides of me. Even as it was, though I got very close up to my game, they were on foot before I saw them and I did not get a standing shot. While carefully looking to my footsteps I paid too little heed to the rifle which I held in my right hand, and let the barrel tap smartly on a tree trunk. Instantly there was a stamp and movement among the bushes ahead and to one side of me; the elk had heard but had neither seen nor smelt me; and

a second afterward I saw the indistinct, shadowy outlines of the band as they trotted down-hill, from where their beds had been made on the very summit of the crest, taking a course diagonal to mine. I raced forward and also down-hill, behind some large mossy boulders, and cut them fairly off, the band passing directly ahead of me and not twenty yards away, at a slashing trot, which a few of them changed for a wild gallop, as I opened fire. I was so hemmed in by the thick tree trunks, and it was so difficult to catch more than a fleeting glimpse of each animal, that though I fired four shots I only brought down one elk, a full-grown cow, with a broken neck, dead in its tracks; but I also broke the hind leg of a bull calf. Elk offer easy marks when in motion, much easier than deer, because of their trotting gait, and their regular, deliberate movements. They look very handsome as they trot through a wood, stepping lightly and easily over the dead trunks and crashing through the underbrush, with the head held up and nose pointing forward. In galloping, however, the neck is thrust straight out in front, and the animal moves with labored bounds, which carry it along rapidly but soon tire it out.

After thrusting the hunting-knife into the throat of the cow, I followed the trail of the band; and in an open glade, filled with tall sage-brush, came

across and finished the wounded calf. Meanwhile the others ran directly across Merrifield's path, and he shot two. This gave us much more meat than we wished, nor would we have shot as many, but neither of us could reckon upon the other's getting as much game, and flesh was a necessity. Leaving Merrifield to skin and cut up the dead animals, I walked back to camp where I found the teamster, who had brought in the hams and tongues of two deer he had shot, and sent him back with a pack-pony for the hides and meat of the elk. Elk tongues are most delicious eating, being jucy, tender, and well flavored; they are excellent to take out as a lunch on a long hunting trip.

We now had more than enough meat in camp, and did not shoot at another cow or calf elk while on the mountains, though we saw quite a number; the last day of my stay I was within fifty yards of two that were walking quietly through a very dense, swampy wood. But it took me some time longer before I got any fine heads.

The day after killing the cow and calf I went out in the morning by myself and hunted through the woods up toward the rocky peaks, going above timber line, and not reaching camp until after nightfall. In hunting through a wild and unknown country a man must always take great care not to get lost. In the first place, he should never,

under any conceivable circumstances, stir fifty yards from camp without a compass, plenty of matches, and his rifle; then he need never feel nervous, even if he is lost, for he can keep himself from cold and hunger, and can steer a straight course until he reaches some settlement. But he should not get lost at all. Old plainsmen or backwoodsmen get to have almost an instinct for finding their way, and are able to tell where they are and the way home in almost any place; probably they keep in their heads an accurate idea of their course and of the general lay of the land. But most men cannot do this. In hunting through a new country a man should, if possible, choose some prominent landmarks, and then should learn how they look from different sides —for they will with difficulty be recognized as the same objects, if seen from different points of view. If he gets out of sight of these, he should choose another to work back to, as a kind of halfway point; and so on. He should keep looking back: it is wonderful how different a country looks when following back on one's trail. If possible, he should locate his camp, in his mind, with reference to a line, and not a point; he should take a river or a long ridge, for example. Then at any time he can strike back to this line and follow it up or down till he gets home.

If possible, I always spend the first day, when

on new ground, in hunting up-stream. Then, so long as I am sure I do not wander off into the valleys or creeks of another water-course, I am safe, for, no matter on what remote branch, all I have to do is to follow down-stream until I reach camp; while if I was below camp, it would be difficult to tell which fork to follow up every time the stream branched. A man should always notice the position of the sun, the direction from which the wind blows, the slope of the water-courses, prominent features in the landscape, and so forth, and should keep in mind his own general course; and he had better err on the side of caution rather than on that of boldness. Getting lost is very uncomfortable, both for the man himself and for those who have to break up their work and hunt for him. Deep woods or perfectly flat, open country are almost equally easy places in which to get lost; while, if the country is moderately open and level, with only here and there a prominent and easily recognized hill or butte, a man can safely go where he wishes, hardly paying any heed to his course. But even here he should know his general direction from camp, so as to be able to steer for it with a compass if a fog comes up. And if he leaves his horse hidden in a gully or pocket while he goes off to hunt on foot, he must recollect to keep the place well in his mind; on one occasion when I feared that somebody

might meddle with my horse, I hid him so successfully that I spent the better part of a day in finding him.

Keeping in mind the above given rules, when I left camp the morning after the breaking up of the band of cows and calves, I hunted up-stream, and across and through the wooded spurs dividing the little brooks that formed its head waters. No game was encountered, except some blue grouse, which I saw when near camp on my return, and shot for the pot. These blue grouse are the largest species found in America, except the sage-fowl. They are exclusively birds of the deep mountain forests, and in their manners remind one of the spruce-grouse of the Northeastern woods, being almost equally tame. When alarmed, they fly at once into a tree, and several can often be shot before the remainder take fright and are off. On this trip we killed a good many, shooting off their heads with our rifles. They formed a most welcome addition to our bill of fare, the meat being white and excellent. A curious peculiarity in their flesh is that the breast meat has in it a layer of much darker color. They are very handsome birds and furnish dainty food to men wearied of venison; but, unless their heads are knocked off with a rifle, they do not furnish much sport, as they will not fly off when flushed, but simply rise into a fairly tall tree, and

there sit, motionless, except that the head is twisted and bobbed around to observe the acts of the foe.

All of the sights and sounds in these pine woods that clothed the Bighorn Mountains reminded me of the similar ones seen and heard in the great sombre forests of Maine and the Adirondacks. The animals and birds were much the same. As in the East, there were red squirrels, chipmunks, red hares, and woodchucks, all of them differing but slightly from our common kinds; woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches, and whiskey jacks came about camp; ravens and eagles flew over the rocky cliffs. There were some new forms, however. The nutcracker, a large, noisy, crow-like bird, with many of the habits of a woodpecker, was common, and in the rocks above timber line, we came upon the Little Chief hare, a wee animal, with a shrill, timorous squeak.

During our stay upon the mountains the weather was generally clear, but always cold — thin ice covering the dark waters of the small mountain tarns, and there were slight snow-falls every two or three days; but we were only kept in camp one day, when it sleeted, snowed, and rained from dawn till nightfall. We passed this day very comfortably, however. I had far too much forethought to go into the woods without a small supply of books for just such occasions. We had

rigged the canvas wagon-sheet into a tent, at the bottom of the ravine, near the willow-covered brink of the brook that ran through it. The steep hillsides bounding the valley, which a little below us became sheer cliffs, were partly covered with great pines and spruces, and partly open ground grown up with tall grass and sage-brush. We were thus well sheltered from the wind; and when, one morning, we looked out and saw the wet snow lying on the ground, and with its weight bending down the willow bushes and loading the tall evergreens, while the freezing sleet rattled against the canvas, we simply started a roaring fire of pine logs in front of the tent, and passed a cosy day inside, cleaning guns, reading, and playing cards. Blue grouse, elk hams, and deer saddles hung from the trees around, so we had no fear of starvation. Still, towards evening we got a little tired, and I could not resist taking a couple of hours' brisk ride in the mist, through a chain of open glades that sloped off from our camp.

Later on, we made a camp at the head of a great natural meadow, where two streams joined together and in times long gone by had been dammed by the beaver. This had at first choked up the passage and made a small lake; then dams were built higher and higher up, making chains of little ponds. By degrees these filled up, and the whole valley became a broad marshy meadow,

through which the brook wound between rows of willows and alders. These beaver meadows are very common; but are not usually of such large size. Around this camp there was very little game; but we got a fine mess of spotted trout by taking a long and most toilsome walk up to a little lake lying very near timber line. Our rods and lines were most primitive, consisting of two clumsy dead cedars (the only trees within reach), about six feet of string tied to one and a piece of catgut to the other, with preposterous hooks; yet the trout were so ravenous that we caught them at the rate of about one a minute; and they formed another welcome change in our camp fare. This lake lay in a valley whose sides were so steep and boulder-covered as to need hard climbing to get into and out of it. Every day in the cold, clear weather we tramped miles and miles through the woods and mountains, which, after a snow storm, took on a really wintry look; while in the moonlight the snow-laden forests shone and sparkled like crystal. The dweller in cities has but a faint idea of the way we ate and slept.

One day Merrifield and I went out together and had a rather exciting chase after some bull elk. The previous evening, toward sunset, I had seen three bulls trotting off across an open glade toward a great stretch of forest and broken ground,

up near the foot of the rocky peaks. Next morning, early, we started off to hunt through this country. The walking was hard work, especially up and down the steep cliffs, covered with slippery pine needles; or among the windfalls, where the rows of dead trees lay piled up across one another in the wildest confusion. We saw nothing until we came to a large patch of burnt ground, where we at once found the soft, black soil marked up by elk hoofs; nor had we penetrated into it more than a few hundred yards before we came to tracks made but a few minutes before, and almost instantly afterwards saw three bull elk, probably those I had seen on the preceding day. We had been running briskly up-hill through the soft, heavy loam, in which our feet made no noise but slipped and sank deeply; as a consequence, I was all out of breath and my hand so unsteady that I missed my first shot. Elk, however, do not vanish with the instantaneous rapidity of frightened deer, and these three trotted off in a direction quartering to us. I doubt if I ever went through more violent exertion than in the next ten minutes. We raced after them at full speed, opening fire; I wounded all three, but none of the wounds were immediately disabling. They trotted on and we panted afterwards, slipping on the wet earth, pitching headlong over charred stumps, leaping on dead logs that broke beneath

our weight, more than once measuring our full-length on the ground, halting and firing whenever we got a chance. At last one bull fell; we passed him by after the others which were still running up-hill. The sweat streamed into my eyes and made furrows in the sooty mud that covered my face, from having fallen full length down on the burnt earth; I sobbed for breath as I toiled at a shambling trot after them, as nearly done out as could well be. At this moment they turned down-hill. It was a great relief; a man who is too done up to go a step up-hill can still run fast enough down; with a last spurt I closed in near enough to fire again: one elk fell; the other went off at a walk. We passed the second elk and I kept on alone after the third, not able to go at more than a slow trot myself, and too much winded to dare risk a shot at any distance. He got out of the burnt patch, going into some thick timber in a deep ravine; I closed pretty well, and rushed, after him into a thicket of young evergreens. Hardly was I in when there was a scramble and bounce among them and I caught a glimpse of a yellow body moving out to one side; I ran out toward the edge and fired through the twigs at the moving beast. Down it went, but when I ran up, to my disgust I found that I had jumped and killed, in my haste, a black-tail deer, which must have been already roused by the passage

of the wounded elk. I at once took up the trail of the latter again, but after a little while the blood grew less, and ceased, and I lost the track; nor could I find it, hunt as hard as I might. The poor beast could not have gone five hundred yards; yet we never found the carcass.

Then I walked slowly back, past the deer I had slain by so curious a mischance, to the elk. The first one shot down was already dead. The second was only wounded, though it could not rise. When it saw us coming it sought to hide from us by laying its neck flat on the ground, but when we came up close it raised its head and looked proudly at us, the heavy mane bristling up on the neck, while its eyes glared and its teeth grated together. I felt really sorry to kill it. Though these were both well-grown elks, their antlers, of ten points, were small, twisted, and ill-shaped; in fact, hardly worth preserving, except to call to mind a chase in which during a few minutes I did as much downright hard work as it has often fallen to my lot to do. The burnt earth had blackened our faces and hands till we looked like negroes.

The bull elk had at this time begun calling, and several times they were heard right round camp at night, challenging one another or calling to the cows. Their calling is known to hunters as "whistling"; but this is a most inappropriate

name for it. It is a most singular and beautiful sound, and is very much the most musical cry uttered by any four-footed beast. When heard for the first time it is almost impossible to believe that it is the call of an animal; it sounds far more as if made by an Æolian harp or some strange wind instrument. It consists of quite a series of notes uttered continuously, in a most soft, musical, vibrant tone, so clearly that they can be heard half a mile off. Heard in the clear, frosty moonlight from the depths of the rugged and forest-clad mountains, the effect is most beautiful; for its charm is heightened by the wild and desolate surroundings. It has the sustained, varied, melody of some bird songs, with, of course, a hundred-fold greater power. Now and then, however, the performance is marred by the elk's apparently getting out of breath towards the close, and winding up with two or three gasping notes which have an unpleasantly mule-like sound.

The great pine-clad mountains, their forests studded with open glades, were the best of places for the still-hunter's craft. Going noiselessly through them in our dull-colored buckskin and noiseless moccasins, we kept getting glimpses, as it were, of the inner life of the mountains. Each animal that we saw had its own individuality. Aside from the thrill and tingle that a hunter experiences at the sight of his game, I by degrees

grew to feel as if I had a personal interest in the different traits and habits of the wild creatures. The characters of the animals differed widely, and the differences were typified by their actions; and it was pleasant to watch them in their own homes. myself unseen, when, after stealthy, silent progress through the sombre and soundless depths of the woods, I came upon them going about the ordinary business of their lives. The lumbering, self-confident gait of the bears, their burly strength, and their half-humorous, half-ferocious look, gave me a real insight into their character; and I never was more impressed by the exhibition of vast, physical power, than when watching from an ambush a grizzly burying or covering up an elk carcass. His motions looked awkward, but it was marvellous to see the ease and absence of effort with which he would scoop out great holes in the earth, or twitch the heavy carcass from side to side. And the proud, graceful, half-timid, half-defiant bearing of the elk was in its own way quite as noteworthy; they seemed to glory in their own power and beauty, and yet to be ever on the watch for foes against whom they knew they might not dare to contend. The true still-hunter should be a lover of nature as well as of sport, or he will miss half the pleasure of being in the woods.

The finest bull, with the best head that I got,

was killed in the midst of very beautiful and grand surroundings. We had been hunting through a great pine wood which ran up to the edge of a broad canyon-like valley, bounded by sheer walls of rock. There were fresh tracks of elk about, and we had been advancing up-wind with even more than our usual caution when, on stepping out into a patch of open ground, near the edge of the cliff, we came upon a great bull, beating and thrashing his antlers against a young tree, about eighty yards off. He stopped and faced us for a second, his mighty antlers thrown in the air, as he held his head aloft. Behind him towered the tall and sombre pines, while at his feet the jutting crags overhung the deep chasm below, that stretched off between high walls of barren and snow-streaked rocks, the evergreens clinging to their sides, while along the bottom the rapid torrent gathered in places into black and sullen mountain lakes. As the bull turned to run I struck him just behind the shoulder; he reeled to the death-blow, but staggered gamely on a few rods into the forest before sinking to the ground, with my second bullet through his lungs.

Two or three days later than this I killed another bull, nearly as large, in the same patch of woods in which I had slain the first. A bear had been feeding on the carcass of the latter, and, after a vain effort to find his den, we determined

to beat through the woods and try to start him up. Accordingly, Merrifield, the teamster, and myself took parallel courses some three hundred yards apart, and started at one end to walk through to the other. I doubt if the teamster much wished to meet a bear alone (while nothing would have given Merrifield more hearty and unaffected enjoyment than to have encountered an entire family), and he gradually edged in pretty close to me. Where the woods became pretty open I saw him suddenly lift his rifle and fire, and immediately afterwards a splendid bull elk trotted past in front of me, evidently untouched, the teamster having missed. The elk ran to the other side of two trees that stood close together some seventy yards off, and stopped for a moment to look round. Kneeling down I fired at the only part of his body I could see between the two trees, and sent a bullet into his flank. Away he went, and I after, running in my moccasins over the moss and pine needles for all there was in me. If a wounded elk gets fairly started he will go at a measured trot for many hours, and even if mortally hurt may run twenty miles before falling; while at the same time he does not start off at full speed, and will often give an active hunter a chance for another shot as he turns and changes his course preparatory to taking a straight line. So I raced along after the elk at my very

best speed for a few hundred feet, and then got another shot as he went across a little glade, injuring his hip somewhat. This made it all right for me, and another hundred yards' burst took me up to where I was able to put a ball in a fatal spot, and the grand old fellow sank down and fell over on his side.

No sportsman can ever feel much keener pleasure and self-satisfaction than when, after a successful stalk and good shot, he walks up to a grand elk lying dead in the cool shade of the great evergreens, and looks at the massive and yet finely moulded form, and at the mighty antlers which are to serve in the future as the trophy and proof of his successful skill. Still-hunting the elk on the mountains is as noble a kind of sport as can well be imagined; there is nothing more pleasant and enjoyable, and at the same time it demands that the hunter shall bring into play many manly qualities. There have been few days of my hunting life that were so full of unalloyed happiness as were those spent on the Bighorn range. From morning till night I was on foot, in cool, bracing air, now moving silently through the vast, melancholy pine forests, now treading the brink of high, rocky precipices, always amid the most grand and beautiful scenery; and always after as noble and lordly game as is to be found in the Western world.

Since writing the above, I killed an elk near

my ranch; probably the last of his race that will ever be found in our neighborhood. It was just before the fall round-up. An old hunter, who was under some obligation to me, told me that he had shot a cow elk and had seen the tracks of one or two others not more than twenty-five miles off, in a place where the cattle rarely wandered. Such a chance was not to be neglected; and, on the first free day, one of my Elkhorn foremen, Will Dow by name, and myself, took our hunting horses and started off, accompanied by the ranch-wagon, in the direction of the probable haunts of the doomed deer. Towards nightfall we struck a deep spring pool, near by the remains of an old Indian encampment. It was at the head of a great basin, several miles across, in which we believed the game to lie. The wagon was halted and we pitched camp; there was plenty of dead wood, and soon the venison steaks were broiling over the coals raked from beneath the crackling cottonwood logs, while in the narrow valleys the ponies grazed almost within the circle of the flickering fire-light. It was in the cool and pleasant month of September; and long after going to bed we lay awake under the blankets watching the stars that on clear nights always shine with such intense brightness over the lonely Western plains.

We were up and off by the gray of the morning.

It was a beautiful hunting day; the sun-dogs hung in the red dawn; the wind hardly stirred over the crisp grass; and though the sky was cloudless yet the weather had that queer, smoky, hazy look that it is most apt to take on during the time of the Indian summer. From a high spur of the table-land we looked out far and wide over a great stretch of broken country, the brown of whose hills and valleys was varied everywhere by patches of dull red and vivid yellow, tokens that the trees were already putting on the dress with which they greet the mortal ripening of the year. The deep and narrow but smooth ravines running up towards the edges of the plateaus were heavily wooded, the bright green tree-tops rising to a height they rarely reach in the barren plains country; and the rocky sides of the sheer gorges were clad with a thick growth of dwarfed cedars, while here and there the trailing Virginia creepers burned crimson among their sombre masses.

We hunted stealthily up-wind, across the line of the heavily timbered coulies. We soon saw traces of our quarry; old tracks at first, and then the fresh footprints of a single elk—a bull, judging by the size—which had come down to drink at the miry alkali pool, its feet slipping so as to leave the marks of the false hoofs in the soft soil. We hunted with painstaking and noiseless

care for many hours; at last, as I led old Manitou up to look over the edge of a narrow ravine, there was a crash and movement in the timber below me, and immediately afterwards I caught a glimpse of a great bull elk trotting up through the young trees as he gallantly breasted the steep hillside opposite. When clear of the woods, and directly across the valley from me, he stopped and turned half round, throwing his head in the air to gaze for a moment at the intruder. My bullet struck too far back, but, nevertheless, made a deadly wound, and the elk went over the crest of the hill at a wild, plunging gallop. We followed the bloody trail for a quarter of a mile, and found him dead in a thicket. Though of large size, he yet had but small antlers, with few points.

## CHAPTER V

### OLD EPHRAIM

BUT few bears are found in the immediate neighborhood of my ranch; and though I have once or twice seen their tracks in the Bad Lands, I have never had any experience with the animals themselves except during the elk-hunting trip on the Bighorn Mountains, described in the preceding chapter.

The grizzly bear undoubtedly comes in the category of dangerous game, and is, perhaps, the only animal in the United States that can be fairly so placed, unless we count the few jaguars found north of the Rio Grande. But the danger of hunting the grizzly has been greatly exaggerated, and the sport is certainly very much safer than it was at the beginning of this century. The first hunters who came into contact with this great bear were men belonging to that hardy and adventurous class of backwoodsmen which had filled the wild country between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi. These men carried but one weapon: the long-barrelled, small-bored pea-rifle, whose bullets ran seventy to the

pound, the amount of powder and lead being a little less than that contained in the cartridge of a thirty-two calibre Winchester. In the Eastern States almost all the hunting was done in the woodland; the shots were mostly obtained at short distance, and deer and black bear were the largest game; moreover, the pea-rifles were marvellously accurate for close range, and their owners were famed the world over for their skill as marksmen. Thus these rifles had so far proved plenty good enough for the work they had to do, and indeed had done excellent service as military weapons in the ferocious wars that the men of the border carried on with their Indian neighbors, and even in conflict with more civilized foes, as at the battles of King's Mountain and New Orleans. But when the restless frontiersmen pressed out over the Western plains, they encountered in the grizzly a beast of far greater bulk and more savage temper than any of those found in the Eastern woods, and their small-bore rifles were utterly inadequate weapons with which to cope with him. It is small wonder that he was considered by them to be almost invulnerable, and extraordinarily tenacious of life. He would be a most unpleasant antagonist now to a man armed only with a thirty-two calibre rifle that carried but a single shot and was loaded at the muzzle. A rifle, to be of use in this sport, should

carry a ball weighing from half an ounce to an ounce. With the old pea-rifles the shot had to be in the eye or heart; and accidents to the hunter were very common. But the introduction of heavy breech-loading repeaters has greatly lessened the danger, even in the very few and far-off places where the grizzlies are as ferocious as formerly. For nowadays these great bears are undoubtedly much better aware of the death-dealing power of men, and, as a consequence, much less fierce, than was the case with their forefathers, who so unhesitatingly attacked the early Western travellers and explorers. Constant contact with rifle-carrying hunters, for a period extending over many generations of bear life, has taught the grizzly by bitter experience that man is his undoubted overlord, as far as fighting goes; and this knowledge has become an hereditary characteristic. No grizzly will assail a man now unprovoked, and one will almost always rather run than fight; though if he is wounded or thinks himself cornered he will attack his foes with a headlong, reckless fury that renders him one of the most dangerous of wild beasts. The ferocity of all wild animals depends largely upon the amount of resistance they are accustomed to meet with, and the quantity of molestation to which they are subjected.

The change in the grizzly's character during the

last half century has been precisely paralleled by the change in the characters of its Northern cousin, the polar bear, and of the South African lion. When the Dutch and Scandinavian sailors first penetrated the Arctic seas, they were kept in constant dread of the white bear, who regarded a man as simply an erect variety of seal, quite as good eating as the common kind. The records of these early explorers are filled with examples of the ferocious and man-eating propensities of the polar bears; but in the accounts of most of the later Arctic expeditions, they are portrayed as having learned wisdom, and being now most anxious to keep out of the way of the hunters. A number of my sporting friends have killed white bears, and none of them were ever even charged. And in South Africa the English sportsmen and Dutch Boers have taught the lion to be a very different creature from what it was when the first white man reached that continent. If the Indian tiger had been a native of the United States, it would now be one of the most shy of beasts. Of late years our estimate of the grizzly's ferocity has been lowered; and we no longer accept the tales of uneducated hunters as being proper authority by which to judge it. But we should make a parallel reduction in the cases of many foreign animals and their describers. Take, for example, that purely melodramatic beast, the North African lion, as

portrayed by Jules Gérard, who bombastically describes himself as "*le tueur des lions*." Gérard's accounts are self-evidently in large part fictitious, while, if true, they would prove less for the bravery of the lion than for the phenomenal cowardice, incapacity, and bad markmanship of the Algerian Arabs. Doubtless Gérard was a great hunter; but so is many a Western plainsman, whose account of the grizzlies he has killed would be wholly untrustworthy. Take, for instance, the following from page 223 of *La Chasse au Lion:* "The inhabitants had assembled one day to the number of two or three hundred, with the object of killing (the lion) or driving it out of the country. The attack took place at sunrise; at midday five hundred cartridges had been expended; the Arabs carried off one of their number dead and six wounded, and the lion remained master of the field of battle." Now, if three hundred men could fire five hundred shots at a lion without hurting him, it merely shows that they were wholly incapable of hurting anything, or else that M. Gérard was more expert with the long-bow than with the rifle. Gérard's whole book is filled with equally preposterous nonsense; yet a great many people seriously accept this same book as trustworthy authority for the manners and ferocity of the North African lion. It would be quite as sensible to accept M. Jules Verne's stories as being valuable contributions to science. A

good deal of the lion's reputation is built upon just such stuff.

How the prowess of the grizzly compares with that of the lion or tiger would be hard to say; I have never shot either of the latter myself, and my brother, who has killed tigers in India, has never had a chance at a grizzly. Any one of the big bears we killed on the mountains would, I should think, have been able to make short work of either a lion or a tiger; for the grizzly is greatly superior in bulk and muscular power to either of the great cats, and its teeth are as large as theirs, while its claws, though blunter, are much longer; nevertheless, I believe that a lion or a tiger would be fully as dangerous to a hunter or other human being, on account of the superior speed of its charge, the lightning-like rapidity of its movements, and its apparently sharper senses. Still, after all is said, the man should have a thoroughly trustworthy weapon and a fairly cool head, who would follow into its own haunts and slay grim Old Ephraim.

A grizzly will only fight if wounded or cornered, or, at least, if he thinks himself cornered. If a man by accident stumbles on to one close up, he is almost certain to be attacked really more from fear than from any other motive; exactly the same reason that makes a rattlesnake strike at a passer-by. I have personally known of but one instance of a grizzly turning on a hunter before being wounded.

This happened to a friend of mine, a Californian ranchman, who, with two or three of his men, was following a bear that had carried off one of his sheep. They got the bear into a cleft in the mountain from which there was no escape, and he suddenly charged back through the line of his pursuers, struck down one of the horsemen, seized the arm of the man in his jaws and broke it as if it had been a pipe-stem, and was only killed after a most lively fight, in which, by repeated charges, he at one time drove every one of his assailants off the field.

But two instances have come to my personal knowledge where a man has been killed by a grizzly. One was that of a hunter at the foot of the Bighorn Mountains who had chased a large bear and finally wounded him. The animal turned at once and came straight at the man, whose second shot missed. The bear then closed and passed on, after striking only a single blow; yet that one blow, given with all the power of its thick, immensely muscular forearm, armed with nails as strong as so many hooked steel spikes, tore out the man's collar-bone and snapped through three or four ribs. He never recovered from the shock, and died that night.

The other instance occurred to a neighbor of mine—who has a small ranch on the Little Missouri—two or three years ago. He was out on a mining trip, and was prospecting with two other

men near the head-water of the Little Missouri, in the Black Hills country. They were walking down along the river, and came to a point of land thrust out into it, which was densely covered with brush and fallen timber. Two of the party walked round by the edge of the stream; but the third, a German, and a very powerful fellow, followed a well-beaten game trail, leading through the bushy point. When they were some forty yards apart the two men heard an agonized shout from the German, and at the same time the loud coughing growl, or roar, of a bear. They turned just in time to see their companion struck a terrible blow on the head by a grizzly, which must have been roused from its lair by his almost stepping on it; so close was it that he had no time to fire his rifle, but merely held it up over his head as a guard. Of course, it was struck down, the claws of the great brute at the same time shattering his skull like an egg-shell. Yet the man staggered on some ten feet before he fell; but when he did he never spoke or moved again. The two others killed the bear after a short brisk struggle as he was in the midst of a most determined charge.

In 1872, near Fort Wingate, New Mexico, two soldiers of a cavalry regiment came to their death at the claws of a grizzly bear. The army surgeon who attended them told me the particulars, as far as they were known. The men were mail-carriers,

and one day did not come in at the appointed time. Next day a relief party was sent out to look for them, and after some search found the bodies of both, as well as that of one of the horses. One of the men still showed signs of life; he came to his senses before dying, and told the story. They had seen a grizzly, and pursued it on horseback with their Spencer rifles. On coming close, one had fired into its side, when it turned with marvellous quickness for so large and unwieldy an animal, and struck down the horse, at the same time inflicting a ghastly wound on the rider. The other man dismounted and came up to the rescue of his companion. The bear then left the latter and attacked the other. Although hit by the bullet, it charged home and threw the man down, and then lay on him and deliberately bit him to death, while his groans and cries were frightful to hear. Afterward it walked off into the bushes without again offering to molest the already mortally wounded victim of its first assault.

At certain times the grizzly works a good deal of havoc among the herds of the stockmen. A friend of mine, a ranchman in Montana, told me that one fall bears became very plenty around his ranches, and caused him severe loss, killing with ease even full-grown beef-steers. But one of them once found his intended quarry too much for him. My friend had a stocky, rather vicious range stal-

lion, which had been grazing one day near a small thicket of bushes, and, towards evening, came galloping in with three or four gashes in his haunch, that looked as if they had been cut with a dull axe. The cowboys knew at once that he had been assailed by a bear, and rode off to the thicket near which he had been feeding. Sure enough, a bear, evidently in a very bad temper, sallied out as soon as the thicket was surrounded, and, after a spirited fight and a succession of charges, was killed. On examination, it was found that his under jaw was broken, and part of his face smashed in, evidently by the stallion's hoofs. The horse had been feeding when the bear leaped out at him, but failed to kill at the first stroke; then the horse lashed out behind, and not only freed himself, but also severely damaged his opponent.

Doubtless the grizzly could be hunted to advantage with dogs, which would not, of course, be expected to seize him, but simply to find and bay him, and distract his attention by barking and nipping. Occasionally, a bear can be caught in the open and killed with the aid of horses. But nine times out of ten the only way to get one is to put on moccasins and still-hunt it in its own haunts, shooting it at close quarters. Either its tracks should be followed until the bed wherein it lies during the day is found, or a given locality in which it is known to exist should be carefully beaten through, or else

a bait should be left out, and a watch kept on it to catch the bear when he has come to visit it.

For some days after our arrival on the Bighorn range we did not come across any grizzly.

Although it was still early in September, the weather was cool and pleasant, the nights being frosty; and every two or three days there was a flurry of light snow, which rendered the labor of tracking much more easy. Indeed, throughout our stay on the mountains, the peaks were snow-capped almost all the time. Our fare was excellent, consisting of elk venison, mountain grouse, and small trout—the last caught in one of the beautiful little lakes that lay almost up by timber line. To us, who had for weeks been accustomed to make small fires from dried brush, or from sage-brush roots, which we dug out of the ground, it was a treat to sit at night before the roaring and crackling pine logs; as the old teamster quaintly put it, we had at last come to a land "where the wood grew on trees." There were plenty of black-tail deer in the woods, and we came across a number of bands of cow and calf elk, or of young bulls; but after several days' hunting we were still without any head worth taking home, and had seen no sign of grizzly, which was the game we were especially anxious to kill; for neither Merrifield nor I had ever seen a wild bear alive.

Sometimes we hunted in company; sometimes each of us went out alone; the teamster, of course, remaining in to guard camp and cook. One day we had separated; I reached camp early in the afternoon, and waited a couple of hours before Merrifield put in an appearance.

At last I heard a shout—the familiar long-drawn *Eikoh-h-h* of the cattlemen,—and he came in sight galloping at speed down an open glade, and waving his hat, evidently having had good luck; and when he reined in his small, wiry, cow-pony, we saw that he had packed behind his saddle the fine, glossy pelt of a black bear. Better still, he annouced that he had been off about ten miles to a perfect tangle of ravines and valleys where bear sign was very thick; and not of black bear either, but of grizzly. The black bear (the only one we got on the mountains) he had run across by accident, while riding up a valley in which there was a patch of dead timber grown up with berry bushes. He noticed a black object which he first took to be a stump; for during the past few days we had each of us made one or two clever stalks up to charred logs, which our imagination converted into bears. On coming near, however, the object suddenly took to its heels; he followed over frightful ground at the pony's best pace, until it stumbled and fell down. By this time he was close on the bear, which had just reached the edge of the

wood. Picking himself up, he rushed after it, hearing it growling ahead of him; after running some fifty yards the sound stopped, and he stood still listening. He saw and heard nothing, until he happened to cast his eyes upwards, and there was the bear, almost overhead, and about twenty-five feet up a tree; and in as many seconds afterwards it came down to the ground with a bounce, stone dead. It was a young bear, in its second year, and had probably never before seen a man, which accounted for the ease with which it was treed and taken. One minor result of the encounter was to convince Merrifield—the list of whose faults did not include lack of self-confidence—that he could run down any bear; in consequence of which idea we on more than one subsequent occasion went through a good deal of violent exertion.

Merrifield's tale made me decide to shift camp at once, and go over to the spot where the bear-tracks were so plenty. Next morning we were off, and by noon pitched camp by a clear brook, in a valley with steep, wooded sides, but with good feed for the horses in the open bottom. We rigged the canvas wagon-sheet into a small tent, sheltered by the trees from the wind, and piled great pine logs near by where we wished to place the fire; for a night camp in the sharp fall weather is cold and dreary unless there is a roaring blaze of flame in front of the tent.

That afternoon we again went out, and I shot a fine bull elk. I came home alone toward nightfall, walking through a reach of burnt forest, where there was nothing but charred tree-trunks and black mould. When nearly through it I came across the huge, half-human footprints of a great grizzly, which must have passed by within a few minutes. It gave me rather an eerie feeling in the silent, lonely woods, to see for the first time the unmistakable proofs that I was in the home of the mighty lord of the wilderness. I followed the tracks in the fading twilight until it became too dark to see them any longer, and then shouldered my rifle and walked back to camp.

That evening we almost had a visit from one of the animals we were after. Several times we had heard at night the musical calling of the bull elk—a sound to which no writer has as yet done justice. This particular night, when we were in bed and the fire was smouldering, we were roused by a ruder noise—a kind of grunting or roaring whine, answered by the frightened snorts of the ponies. It was a bear which had evidently not seen the fire, as it came from behind the bank, and had probably been attracted by the smell of the horses. After it made out what we were, it stayed round a short while, again uttered its peculiar roaring grunt, and went off; we had seized our rifles and had run out into the woods, but in the darkness could see noth-

ing; indeed, it was rather lucky we did not stumble across the bear, as he could have made short work of us when we were at such a disadvantage.

Next day we went off on a long tramp through the woods and along the sides of the canyons. There were plenty of berry bushes growing in clusters; and all around these there were fresh tracks of bear. But the grizzly is also a flesh-eater, and has a great liking for carrion. On visiting the place where Merrifield had killed the black bear, we found that the grizzlies had been there before us, and had utterly devoured the carcass, with cannibal relish. Hardly a scrap was left, and we turned our steps toward where lay the bull elk I had killed. It was quite late in the afternoon when we reached the place. A grizzly had evidently been at the carcass during the preceding night, for his great footprints were in the ground all around it, and the carcass itself was gnawed and torn, and partially covered with earth and leaves—for the grizzly has a curious habit of burying all of his prey that he does not at the moment need. A great many ravens had been feeding on the body, and they wheeled about over the tree-tops above us, uttering their barking croaks.

The forest was composed mainly of what are called ridge-pole pines, which grow close together, and do not branch out until the stems are thirty or forty feet from the ground. Beneath these trees we

walked over a carpet of pine needles, upon which our moccasined feet made no sound. The woods seemed vast and lonely, and their silence was broken now and then by the strange noises always to be heard in the great forests, and which seem to mark the sad and everlasting unrest of the wilderness. We climbed up along the trunk of a dead tree which had toppled over until its upper branches struck in the limb crotch of another, that thus supported it at an angle half way in its fall. When above the ground far enough to prevent the bear's smelling us, we sat still to wait for his approach; until, in the gathering gloom, we could no longer see the sights of our rifles, and could but dimly make out the carcass of the great elk. It was useless to wait longer; and we clambered down and stole out to the edge of the woods. The forest here covered one side of a steep, almost canyon-like ravine, whose other side was bare except of rock and sage-brush. Once out from under the trees there was still plenty of light, although the sun had set, and we crossed over some fifty yards to the opposite hillside, and crouched down under a bush to see if, perchance, some animal might not also leave the cover. To our right the ravine sloped downward toward the valley of the Big-horn River, and far on its other side we could catch a glimpse of the great main chain of the Rockies, their snow-peaks glinting crimson in the light of

the set sun. Again we waited quietly in the growing dusk until the pine-trees in our front blended into one dark, frowning mass. We saw nothing; but the wild creatures of the forest had begun to stir abroad. The owls hooted dismally from the tops of the tall trees, and two or three times a harsh wailing cry, probably the voice of some lynx or wolverine, arose from the depths of the woods. At last, as we were rising to leave, we heard the sound of the breaking of a dead stick from the spot where we knew the carcass lay. It was a sharp, sudden noise, perfectly distinct from the natural creaking and snapping of the branches; just such a sound as would be made by the tread of some heavy creature. "Old Ephraim" had come back to the carcass. A minute afterward, listening with strained ears, we heard him brush by some dry twigs. It was entirely too dark to go in after him; but we made up our minds that on the morrow he should be ours.

Early next morning we were over at the elk carcass, and, as we expected, found that the bear had eaten his full at it during the night. His tracks showed him to be an immense fellow, and were so fresh that we doubted if he had left long before we arrived; and we made up our minds to follow him up and try to find his lair. The bears that lived on these mountains had evidently been little disturbed; indeed, the Indians and most of the white

hunters are rather chary of meddling with "Old Ephraim," as the mountain men style the grizzly, unless they get him at a disadvantage; for the sport is fraught with some danger and but small profit. The bears thus seemed to have very little fear of harm, and we thought it likely that the bed of the one who had fed on the elk would not be far away.

My companion was a skilful tracker, and we took up the trail at once. For some distance it led over the soft, yielding carpet of moss and pine needles, and the footprints were quite easily made out, although we could follow them but slowly; for we had, of course, to keep a sharp lookout ahead and around us as we walked noiselessly on in the sombre half-light always prevailing under the great pine-trees, through whose thickly interlacing branches stray but few beams of light, no matter how bright the sun may be outside. We made no sound ourselves, and every little sudden noise sent a thrill through me as I peered about with each sense on the alert. Two or three of the ravens that we had scared from the carcass flew overhead, croaking hoarsely; and the pine-tops moaned and sighed in the slight breeze—for pine-trees seem to be ever in motion, no matter how light the wind.

After going a few hundred yards the tracks turned off on a well-beaten path made by the elk; the woods were in many places cut up by these

game trails, which had often become as distinct as ordinary foot-paths. The beast's footprints were perfectly plain in the dust, and he had lumbered along up the path until near the middle of the hillside, where the ground broke away, and there were hollows and boulders. Here there had been a windfall, and the dead trees lay among the living, piled across one another in all directions; while between and around them sprouted up a thick growth of young spruces and other evergreens. The trail turned off into the tangled thicket, within which it was almost certain we would find our quarry. We could still follow the tracks, by the slight scrapes of the claws on the bark, or by the bent and broken twigs; and we advanced with noiseless caution, slowly climbing over the dead tree trunks and upturned stumps, and not letting a branch rustle or catch on our clothes. When in the middle of the thicket we crossed what was almost a breastwork of fallen logs, and Merrifield, who was leading, passed by the upright stem of a great pine. As soon as he was by it, he sank suddenly on one knee, turning half round, his face fairly aflame with excitement; and as I strode past him, with my rifle at the ready, there, not ten steps off, was the great bear, slowly rising from his bed among the young spruces. He had heard us, but apparently hardly knew exactly where or what we were, for he reared up on his

haunches sideways to us. Then he saw us, and dropped down again on all fours, the shaggy hair on his neck and shoulders seeming to bristle as he turned towards us. As he sank down on his fore-feet I had raised the rifle; his head was bent slightly down, and when I saw the top of the white bead fairly between his small, glittering, evil eyes, I pulled trigger. Half rising up, the huge beast fell over on his side in the death throes, the ball having gone into his brain, striking as fairly between the eyes as if the distance had been measured by a carpenter's rule.

The whole thing was over in twenty seconds from the time I caught sight of the game; indeed, it was over so quickly that the grizzly did not have time to show fight at all or come a step toward us. It was the first I had ever seen, and I felt not a little proud, as I stood over the great brindled bulk, which lay stretched out at length in the cool shade of the evergreens. He was a monstrous fellow, much larger than any I have seen since, whether alive or brought in dead by the hunters. As near as we could estimate (for of course we had nothing with which to weigh more than very small portions) he must have weighed about twelve hundred pounds, and though this is not as large as some of his kind are said to grow in California, it is yet a very unusual size for a bear. He was a good deal heavier than any of our horses; and it

was with the greatest difficulty that we were able to skin him. He must have been very old, his teeth and claws being all worn down and blunted; but nevertheless he had been living in plenty, for he was as fat as a prize hog, the layers on his back being a finger's length in thickness. He was still in the summer coat, his hair being short, and in color a curious brindled brown, somewhat like that of certain bulldogs; while all the bears we shot afterward had the long thick winter fur, cinnamon or yellowish brown. By the way, the name of this bear has reference to its character and not to its color, and should, I suppose, be properly spelt grisly—in the sense of horrible, exactly as we speak of a "grisly spectre"—and not grizzly; but perhaps the latter way of spelling it is too well established to be now changed.

In killing dangerous game, steadiness is more needed than good shooting. No game is dangerous unless a man is close up, for nowadays hardly any wild beast will charge from a distance of a hundred yards, but will rather try to run off; and if a man is close it is easy enough for him to shoot straight if he does not lose his head. A bear's brain is about the size of a pint bottle; and any one can hit a pint bottle offhand at thirty or forty feet. I have had two shots at bears at close quarters, and each time I fired into the brain, the bullet in one case striking fairly between the eyes, as told

above, and in the other going in between the eye and ear. A novice at this kind of sport will find it best and safest to keep in mind the old Norse viking's advice in reference to a long sword: "If you go in close enough your sword will be long enough." If a poor shot goes in close enough he will find that he shoots straight enough.

I was very proud over my first bear; but Merrifield's chief feeling seemed to be disappointment that the animal had not had time to show fight. He was rather a reckless fellow, and very confident in his own skill with the rifle; and he really did not seem to have any more fear of the grizzlies than if they had been so many jack-rabbits. I did not at all share his feelings, having a hearty respect for my foes' prowess, and in following and attacking them always took all possible care to get the chances on my side. Merrifield was sincerely sorry that we never had to stand a regular charge; while on this trip we killed five grizzlies with seven bullets, and, except in the case of the she and cub spoken of farther on, each was shot about as quickly as it got sight of us. The last one we got was an old male, which was feeding on an elk carcass. We crept up to within about sixty feet, and as Merrifield had not yet killed a grizzly purely to his own gun, and I had killed three, I told him to take the shot. He at once whispered gleefully: "I 'll break his leg, and we 'll see what he 'll do!"

Having no ambition to be a participator in the antics of a three-legged bear, I hastily interposed a most emphatic veto; and with a rather injured air he fired, the bullet going through the neck just back of the head. The bear fell to the shot, and could not get up from the ground, dying in a few minutes; but first he seized his left wrist in his teeth and bit clean through it, completely separating the bones of the paw and arm. Although a smaller bear than the big one I first shot, he would probably have proved a much more ugly foe, for he was less unwieldy, and had much longer and sharper teeth and claws. I think that if my companion had merely broken the beast's leg, he would have had his curiosity as to its probable conduct more than gratified.

We tried eating the grizzly's flesh, but it was not good, being coarse and not well flavored; and, besides, we could not get over the feeling that it had belonged to a carrion feeder. The flesh of the little black bear, on the other hand, was excellent; it tasted like that of a young pig. Doubtless, if a young grizzly, which had fed merely upon fruits, berries, and acorns, was killed, its flesh would prove good eating; but even then it would probably not be equal to a black bear.

A day or two after the death of the big bear, we went out one afternoon on horseback, intending merely to ride down to see a great canyon lying

some six miles west of our camp; indeed, we went more to look at the scenery than for any other reason, though, of course, neither of us ever stirred out of camp without his rifle. We rode down the valley in which we had camped, through alternate pine groves and open glades, until we reached the canyon, and then skirted its brink for a mile or so. It was a great chasm, many miles in length, as if the table-land had been rent asunder by some terrible and unknown force; its sides were sheer walls of rock, rising three or four hundred feet straight up in the air, and worn by the weather till they looked like the towers and battlements of some vast fortress. Between them, at the bottom, was a space, in some places nearly a quarter of a mile wide, in others very narrow, through whose middle foamed a deep, rapid torrent, of which the sources lay far back among the snow-topped mountains around Cloud Peak. In this valley, dark green, sombre pines stood in groups, stiff and erect; and here and there among them were groves of poplar and cottonwood, with slender branches and trembling leaves, their bright green already changing to yellow in the sharp fall weather. We went down to where the mouth of the canyon opened out, and rode our horses to the end of a great jutting promontory of rock, thrust out into the plain; and in the cold, clear air we looked far over the broad valley of the Bighorn as it lay at our very feet,

walled in on the other side by the distant chain of the Rocky Mountains.

Turning our horses, we rode back along the edge of another canyon-like valley, with a brook flowing down its centre, and its rocky sides covered with an uninterrupted pine forest—the place of all others in whose inaccessible wildness and ruggedness a bear would find a safe retreat. After some time we came to where other valleys, with steep, grass-grown sides, covered with sage-brush, branched out from it, and we followed one of these out. There was plenty of elk sign about, and we saw several black-tail deer. These last were very common on the mountains, but we had not hunted them at all, as we were in no need of meat. But this afternoon we came across a buck with remarkably fine antlers, and accordingly I shot it, and we stopped to cut off and skin out the horns, throwing the reins over the heads of the horses, and leaving them to graze by themselves. The body lay near the crest of one side of a deep valley, or ravine, which headed up on the plateau a mile to our left. Except for scattered trees and bushes the valley was bare; but there was heavy timber along the crests of the hills on its opposite side. It took some time to fix the head properly, and we were just ending when Merrifield sprang to his feet and exclaimed: "Look at the bears!" pointing down into the valley below us. Sure enough, there were

two bears (which afterwards proved to be an old she and a nearly full-grown cub) travelling up the bottom of the valley, much too far off for us to shoot. Grasping our rifles and throwing off our hats, we started off as hard as we could run, diagonally down the hillside, so as to cut them off. It was some little time before they saw us, when they made off at a lumbering gallop up the valley. It would seem impossible to run into two grizzlies in the open, but they were going up hill and we down, and, moreover, the old one kept stopping. The cub would forge ahead and could probably have escaped us, but the mother now and then stopped to sit up on her haunches and look round at us, when the cub would run back to her. The upshot was that we got ahead of them, when they turned and went straight up one hillside as we ran straight down the other behind them. By this time I was pretty nearly done out, for running along the steep ground through the sage-brush was most exhausting work; and Merrifield kept gaining on me and was well in front. Just as he disappeared over a bank, almost at the bottom of the valley, I tripped over a bush and fell full-length. When I got up I knew I could never make up the ground I had lost, and, besides, could hardly run any longer; Merrifield was out of sight below, and the bears were laboring up the steep hillside directly opposite and about three hundred yards off,

so I sat down and began to shoot over Merrifield's head, aiming at the big bear. She was going very steadily and in a straight line, and each bullet sent up a puff of dust where it struck the dry soil, so that I could keep correcting my aim; and the fourth ball crashed into the old bear's flank. She lurched heavily forward, but recovered herself and reached the timber, while Merrifield, who had put on a spurt, was not far behind.

I toiled up the hill at a sort of trot, fairly gasping and sobbing for breath; but before I got to the top I heard a couple of shots and a shout. The old bear had turned as soon as she was in the timber, and came towards Merrifield, but he gave her the death wound by firing into her chest, and then shot at the young one, knocking it over. When I came up he was just walking toward the latter to finish it with the revolver, but it suddenly jumped up as lively as ever and made off at a great pace—for it was nearly full-grown. It was impossible to fire where the tree trunks were so thick, but there was a small opening across which it would have to pass, and, collecting all my energies, I made a last run, got into position, and covered the opening with my rifle. The instant the bear appeared I fired, and it turned a dozen somersaults down hill, rolling over and over; the ball had struck it near the tail, and had ranged forward through the hollow of the body. Each of us had thus given the fatal wound

to the bear into which the other had fired the first bullet. The run, though short, had been very sharp, and over such awful country that we were completely fagged out, and could hardly speak for lack of breath. The sun had already set, and it was too late to skin the animals; so we merely dressed them, caught the ponies,—with some trouble, for they were frightened at the smell of the bear's blood on our hands,—and rode home through the darkening woods. Next day we brought the teamster and two of the steadiest pack-horses to the carcasses, and took the skins into camp.

The feed for the horses was excellent in the valley in which we were camped, and the rest after their long journey across the plains did them good. They had picked up wonderfully in condition during our stay on the mountains; but they were apt to wander very far during the night, for there were so many bears and other wild beasts around, that they kept getting frightened and running off. We were very loath to leave our hunting-grounds, but time was pressing, and we had already many more trophies than we could carry; so one cool morning, when the branches of the evergreens were laden with the feathery snow that had fallen overnight, we struck camp and started out of the mountains, each of us taking his own bedding behind his saddle, while the pack-ponies were loaded down with

bearskins, elk and deer antlers, and the hides and furs of other game. In single file we moved through the woods, and across the canyons to the edge of the great table-land, and then slowly down the steep slope to its foot, where we found our canvas-topped wagon; and next day saw us setting out on our long journey homewards, across the three hundred weary miles of treeless and barren-looking plains country.

Last spring, since the above was written, a bear killed a man not very far from my ranch. It was at the time of the floods. Two hunters came down the river, by our ranch, on a raft, stopping to take dinner. A score or so of miles below, as we afterwards heard from the survivor, they landed, and found a bear in a small patch of brushwood. After waiting in vain for it to come out, one of the men rashly attempted to enter the thicket, and was instantly struck down by the beast, before he could so much as fire his rifle. It broke in his skull with a blow of its great paw, and then seized his arm in its jaws, biting it through and through in three places, but leaving the body and retreating into the bushes as soon as the unfortunate man's companion approached. We did not hear of the accident until too late to go after the bear, as we were just about starting to join the spring round-up.

## ADDENDUM

In speaking of the trust antelope place in their eyesight as a guard against danger, I do not mean to imply that their noses are not also very acute; it is as important with them as with all other game to prevent their getting the hunter's wind. So with deer; while their eyes are not as sharp as those of big-horn and prong-horn, they are yet quite keen enough to make it necessary for the still-hunter to take every precaution to avoid being seen.

Although with us antelope display the most rooted objection to entering broken or wooded ground, yet a friend of mine, whose experience in the hunting field is many times as great as my own, tells me that in certain parts of the country they seem by preference to go among the steepest and roughest places (of course, in so doing, being obliged to make vertical as well as horizontal leaps), and even penetrate into thick woods. Indeed, no other species seems to show such peculiar "freakiness" of character, both individually and locally.

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